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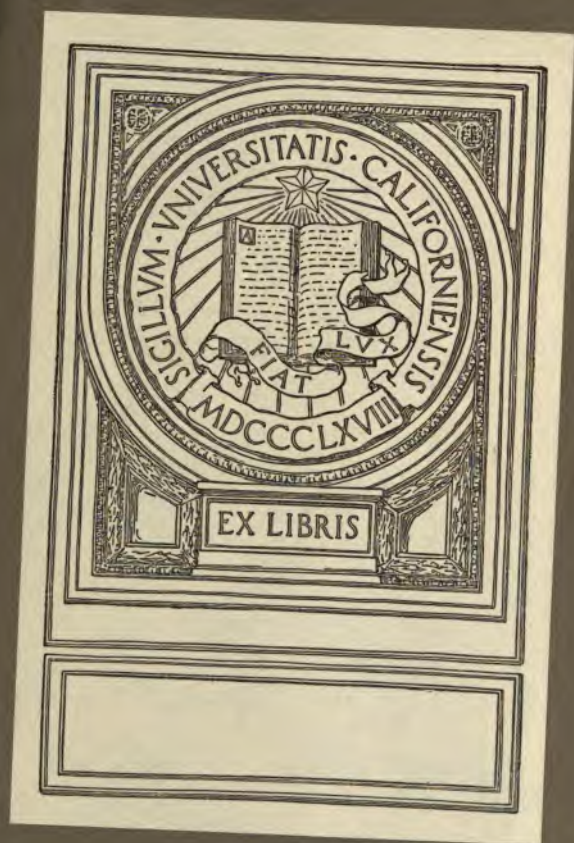
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THE YOUNG STAGERS

BY

PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

AUTHOR OF "DEW AND MILDEW," "FATHER GREGORY," "SNAKE AND SWORD,"
"DRIFTWOOD SPARS," "THE WAGES OF VIRTUE,"
"STEPSONS OF FRANCE," ETC.

BEING FURTHER FAITES AND GESTES OF THE JUNIOR CURLTON
CLUB OF KARABAD, INDIA, WHEREOF SOME WERE
HERETOFORE SET FORTH IN THE BOOK
YCLEFT DEW AND MILDEW

THE
YOUNG STAGERS

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

1917

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ABSTRACT

TO
GUYTON BUTLER, Esq.
IN MEMORY OF SOME DAYS AND NIGHTS
UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS,
AND
OF MUCH KINDNESS TO THE
OFFICIALS,
PAST AND PRESENT,
OF THE
JUNIOR CURLTON CLUB.

500249

v

THE JUNIOR CURLTON CLUB OF KARABAD.

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MRS. PERFECT	A NURSE AND VIRTUOUS WOMAN.
OTHERS	VARIOUS.

FOREWORD.

EAVESDROPPERS are supposed to be a base and despicable race—but I must confess to having “dropped” an enormous number of “eaves” in the Junior Curlton Club of Karabad.

It was my deceitful practice to occupy the next room to the big club-room at every possible opportunity, to set the communicating-door ajar, and to listen.

To listen to what is surely one of the sweetest, most innocent, most natural, and most instructive of all languages—the unrestrained un-self-conscious chatter of happy children.

“ . . . *Ecce quam sempiterna vox juventutis.*”

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I.

**THE SAXON AND THE GAEL AND
THINGS.**

I.

THE SAXON AND THE GAEL AND
THINGS.

THE Chief in silence strode before and reached the torrent's sounding shore. The torrent was provided by the bath-room water-tap, and did very well. Too well, Ayah thought, when she returned from her meal and siesta. The Chief strode in silence and little else, as his tartan plaid was a piece of tartan ribbon and his kilt a brief petticoat—brief even for this little girl of eight. Fitz-James in silence strode behind, and then spoilt everything by breaking the silence and becoming a brass band. Association of ideas, no doubt, for when he marched behind the President he was usually a band, procession, Greek Chorus, or a general choral atmosphere.

"Shut up, Fizz-James, you 'normous ass," hissed the Chief, casting a fiery eye over her

bare shoulder. "You've only got to strode, like me, till we get to Koil-and-Poggie Ford, and thou must keep thee with thy sword—until I let you do me in."

Fitz-James ceased to play an imaginary bugle and to beat a figmentary drum. He sighed at his unworthiness.

Having circumambulated the bath-room and parts adjacent, the Chief halted, well within the radius of the splashes from the torrent, shook his sword menacingly, raised his shield, scowled horribly, and suddenly thrusting his ferocious face into that of the fascinated Fitz-James, cried, "And, Stranger, *I* am Brodrick Two!"

Fitz-James over-acted, being but young. He rendered "surprise and slight consternation," by collapsing upon the ground, fetching a deep groan, and murmuring "Help!"

The President remembered that the years of the Vice were not six, and was lenient.

"Pull yourself together, Fizz-James, and play the man this day," continued Roderic Dhu. "Get out of the wet, and buck up, for I have sworn this braid to stain in the best blug that

warms thy vein—(where did I put that beastly braid?) D'you hear, Fizz-James? And I shall jolly well cut any vein I like."

"You be careful, Robberic," said Fitz-James, rising and attempting to draw his sword.

"Not at all," was the reply, "and this rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I. See?"

The rock was the inverted bath, resting upon its handles. The Vice, essaying to lean upon it while he wrestled with his recalcitrant sword, found that it was not based with such firmness as to warrant its use as a simile.

Roderic Dhu looked to earth, and sky, and plain, as things he ne'er might see again.

"Would you mind helping me out with this thword, Robberic?" politely asked Fitz-James. "If I pull, this button will come *right* off, and my drawers will come down." As he was arrayed only in two tight garments this seemed undesirable, particularly in a Stranger.

"I *will*, James Fizz," replied Roderic, "but some people wouldn't. Not for the person by whom they were just going to be done in—and with that very sword. . . . There you are. . . .

If you are ready, it's got to ill-fare it then with Brodrick Two when on the ground his Taj he threw, whose studs of brass and tough bull-hide had death so often dashed aside. They are bone studs of Daddy's because he hadn't any studs of brass, and didn't seem to want to lend any gold ones. And the bull's hide is card-board—but it's a Taj all-right."

"I thought the Taj was a hotel," observed Fitz-James. "I wemember we went . . ."

"You're too fond of thinking, James Fizz," interrupted Roderic. "What about Blue Murder—no, Red Murdoch—I mean?"

Fitz-James's eye gleamed. He had his cue. "He's staff and stick," he said.

"He's *what*, you ass?" queried Roderic coldly.

"He's stark and, stiff," the other corrected, and, striking the attitude shown him by the President at rehearsal, and confirmed by the picture, he declaimed :—

"The wriggle is already dead
And I wemember what you said—
Er—and beneath the whiff
There lies Red Murdoch stark and stiff."

"Oh, really?" sneered Roderic, "and who stark-and-stiffed him, pray?"

"*I* did," replied Fitz-James. "I did him in proper." (Subaltern language, this.)

"H'm," commented Roderic. "That's awkward—because the side wins that gets first blood. . . ."

"*Was* there any blood?" he added, as an idea struck him, and he saw a loop-hole of escape from the operation of the baleful prophecy.

"Lots," was the depressing answer. "I stained a whole roll of braid in the best of it. All my clo'ves too—*and* his. Norful mess!"

"Well, anyhow, it's beneath the *cliff*, he lies, not 'whiff'. I daresay there *is* a whiff, by now—but that's not what you meant."

The bitterness of death was not past for Roderic, and he spoke bitterly.

As he prepared to fight his last fight and meet his end at the hand of the hated Southron, he protruded his tongue and made a shocking grimace.

"Yah! Fizz-Jimmy, you beastly Sack-Son," quoth he, "Come on! Beware! Thy hand must

keep thy head and all the rest of thee for, as I said before, this is Koil-and-Poggie Ford, and Sack-Son, I am a perfect *Gale*! Lay on—and no prodding in the stummick. . . .”

Ill fared it then with Roderic Dhu, as d(h)uly laid down in the poem and shown forth in the picture.

It was a truly Homeric combat, and when Brodrick Two got a nasty crack across the knuckles, he only put his sword in his other hand the while he sucked them. But his eye flashed fire.

“I’ll be Fizz-James next time,” he panted, as he received, but recked not of, a wound. Apparently Fitz-James concluded that the best thing to do, in view of this threatened change of *rôle*, was to make hay while the sun shone, for, as, with a heart-rending groan, Roderic sank to earth and closed his eyes, he dealt him a superfluous and uncalled for *coup de grâce*. Worse, it partook of the nature of a prohibited “prod in the stummick”. Too immersed in the enthralling business of artistic death-throes to protest, Roderic but rolled over on to the illegally as-

saulted part, and with his head upon his folded arms, continued to render up his spirit with the calm dignity of a Chieftain of Clan Alpine.

Here it was that the Vice displayed that lack of complete sense of the fitness of things, perfect histrionic taste, and absolute reliability which occasionally caused sorrow and chagrin to the President.

Raising his blood-stained weapon aloft in both hands, he flourished it above the prostrate body of the Chieftain, and, then (alas, that this faithful though eaves-dropping chronicler must painfully set it forth), brought it down with a resounding thwack upon the proud Gael's exiguous kilt—even as he murmured, all unsuspecting such baseness :—

“Oh, Golly! I am slain at last!”

But the while he stiffened and grew cold in *rigor mortis*, he opened one eye, glared at the swaggering victor, and hissed, with deadly meaning, “Yes, I'll be Fizz-James next time!”

II.

ANCIENT BRITONS AND MODERN.

II.

ANCIENT BRITONS AND MODERN.

IN India, during the monsoon, and at other times, damp clothes are dried by laying them over a vast inverted basket beneath which smoulders a brazier of charcoal.

Ayah was airing clean clothes upon such a basket as the children passed through the big empty landing behind the Club premises—(the Nursery, to wit).

Ayah removed the warm, dry clothes and departed to bestow them in their respective cupboards.

As the eye of the President fell upon the dully glowing charcoal, visible through the large interstices and apertures of the crude basket-work, an idea germinated in her fertile brain.

"I say, Fic," quoth she to the faithful Vice, "how'd you like to play Judgment Day? Or

would you rather have the Invasion of Britain, or the Forty Thieves?"

The Invasion he knew, and the Thieves he knew, but what was Judgment Day?

"Will you be a Miserable Sinner, an Ancient Briton, or a Forty Thief?" continued the President.

"What d'you have to do, if you're a Mitherable Thinner?" inquired the Vice.

"Oh, be tried on Judgment Day," was the reply. "If found guilty, you'd go to Hell. That would make a *fine* Hell for Miserable Sinners," and she pointed to the fire-enclosing basket.

"What would *you* be, if I was a Mitherable Thinner?" queried the junior official.

"God," was the prompt reply. "I should sit on a Throne and judge you. . . . I might have to send you to Hell."

"What would I do there?" asked the Vice doubtfully.

"Burn," replied the President sepulchrally.

The Vice preferred to bear a hand in the Invasion of Britain, or in resisting the same.

"I wonder what we could have for woad," pondered the President, on finding that her colleague had rooted objections to sustaining the *rôle* of a Miserable Sinner on Judgment Day.

"Woad is what the Ancient Britons went about in," she said. "Buster told me all about the Invasion of Britain when I showed him the picture. He said they went about in the woady buff and didn't care a blow. Not if it rained. . . . No police and no Grundies, he said."

"But what *is* woad?" asked he of the tenacious and inquiring mind.

"Paint. Blue paint. Something like the blue devils and dragons on Buster's arm. Like tattooing."

The Vice's spirit soared, and he produced an idea, simple as all great notions are.

"Paint me blue with the 'pwussian blue' in your box of water colourths," he said, and capered with glee at the very bare idea.

His leader congratulated him upon his quiet brilliance, bade him disrobe to the irreducible minimum the while she disinterred her paint-box and procured a cup of water. .

The Vice was quickly rendered woody, and so were his tight, brief, nether garments, as the paint trickled. He was then stood in the sun and breeze of the verandah to dry.

"Try and dry a *nice* blue," adjured the President, "while I tie the lid of the soap-dish on to a stick for a stone-axe. You'll have to be jolly careful how you chop me with it when I'm the Censurian of the Tenth Legion."

"Might I cut a bit off you?"

"You might break the lid of the soap-dish, silly."

Having provided the Woody One with a stone-axe and a bone-headed spear which had once been a bone-handled umbrella, the President proceeded to set him up in life with even greater opulence. Visions of nothing less than a scythe-axled chariot were floating in her enterprising and inventive mind.

"You know those things in the picture, like, milk-carts with grass-scythes on the wheels, don't you?" said she. "They were called *chariots*, and you stood up in them, and drove them about, cutting people's legs off as you went

by. It *must* have been lovely. . . . I b'lieve I could make one. Only if you fall out you mustn't fall on the scythe—or you'll get into trouble. . . . Your old go-cart and a couple of carving-knives would do."

They toyed with the idea until the Vice became ecstatic, and the President knew the double joy of creation and applause.

It was easier than had been expected, to secure two knives, poke them through the wheels and fasten them with string to the axle. The protruding blades were most realistic, almost too much so when the Vice scratched a woody leg on the point of one, and the President cut her finger. However, there cannot be an Invasion of Britain without the effusion of blood. You couldn't expect it. Besides a good layer of thickish cloggy woad soon stops the bleeding.

The rocking-horse, Amir, having been harnessed to the chariot and a bear-skin rug thrown over it, no one with the imagination of a flea and the soul of a frog could have failed to perceive in it the very last word in scythe-wheeled chariots. Surely the most ancient of the honour-

able order of Ancient Britons would have described it as a vastly modish war-curricule, in fact the Ancient British War Office sealed-pattern war-car.

Indeed it so appealed to its delighted inventor that she hung in doubt as to whether she should side with the Ancient ones and be Boadicea of the Iceni, or undo them in the part of the Centurion of the Tenth Legion, until she decided to play both *rôles, seriatim*.

"Look here, Hog-and-Magog, which is your Ancient British name, only I shall call you Hog for short, I am going to be Queen Bawdy Seer of the Eye-seen-eye first, and this is *my* chariot, and Amir has got to reckon himself three horses at once, as is usual in war-chariots. I . . ."

"I thought it was *my* chariot," interrupted the disappointed Vice.

"You're always thinking," rebuked his senior colleague. "You better *thtoppit* if we are to get on with things. *Your* chariot! And I suppose you'd like the Queen of the Eye-seen-eye to walk while *you* tool along in a chariot! Well

art thou named *Hog*, O Ancient Briton. And aren't you about dry now?"

"Yes. Are you going to be an Ansiatic Briton? Can I paint *you*? I'm a norful good artith, Buthter thaid tho!" said the Vice hopefully.

"No, Ancient British ladies didn't paint," was the chilling answer. "Besides I am going to be a Queen—not a woady buffer. My name's Bawdy Seer, and you can call me Baw or Bawdy, for short, if you can't remember it all."

"Thanks," returned the Vice, conscious of terrible deficiencies in this direction. He did his best to remember and understand, but realised that his stupidity, ignorance, and inferior histrionic powers often took the guilt off the ginger-bread, when they did not actually take the ginger-bread from under the guilt.

"Now, then, Hog," continued the Queen, "can you *surge*? If so, crowd round my chariot into a fearful, howling, surging mob, and I will make a stirring speech. . . . Mind you are stirred a lot," she added *sotto voce*.

"Friends, Britons, Countrybreds, lend me your

ears," were the opening words of the stirring speech.

The fearful, howling mob had heard them before, but howled with no less enthusiasm. It was a part in which the Vice was at home and which he supported well. He loved being an army, procession, crowd, retainers, jury or alarums-and-excursions-without. In a collective part he was free from self-consciousness and *mauvaise honte*. But——

"Stop that filthy row," were the following words as the incensed monarch found her voice all but drowned by the superabundant howling of the mob. "Be a fearful howling mob without so much noise while I am talking. Some of you mobs have no more sense than rabbits. I'm *always* telling you about it. *Pukka poggles!* Howl every time I stop for breath—not *all* the time."

Cowed by the Queen's flashing eye and biting words, the mob fell silent—feeling that life was hard even while awaiting so much as a catch in the breath of the Queen, that it might dutifully let its most mobby howl.

"Friends, Britons, Countrybreds," continued Boadicea, "lend me your ears and " (with a nod to the Vice) "your mouths."

Loud and prolonged howls from the surging mob.

"These snifty Romans are about to invade our private country, and we must arise in our might and—er—puck them in the neck."

Loud and prolonged howls from the surging mob.

"I have got it in for them because they scourged me too—you know, gave me an awful hiding. I was licked by the Lictor—lammed like anything."

Loud cheers from the mob.

"That's nothing to cheer about you 'normous Asses. . . . Anyhow, they are about to invade us somewhere about Bournemouth beach, and it is up to all good Ancient Britons to arise in their might and biff them on the napper. . . . (Cheer, you Fat-heads!) . . . I shall lead you in battle and drive this chariot myself. You will see many Romans cut in halves and, if you watch carefully, perhaps Julius Cæsar himself—

though perhaps he has got more sense than to get in my way. My faithful armour-bearer, Hog, will have a free ride by my side and pot any Roman seen interfering with the horse—I mean the three horses—as they gallop along. He is Company Marksman——”

Wild yelps from the mob.

—“at very short range.”

Soft murmurs from mob.

“Thank you, my friends, thank you,” concluded the Queen. “The collection will be in aid of the families of me and the Hog.”

The next thing was to discover some reasonably satisfactory Romans.

“I don’t thuppothe Widdy and Venus would mind taking part,” suggested the Vice.

Widdy was a big white Persian cat, and Venus a bigger white bull-dog.

“No,” agreed the Vice, “they wouldn’t mind obliging. Rout them out.”

Widdy, as usual, was asleep in her basket on the back verandah and Venus was in his kennel. They expressed no objection to sustaining the rôles of Romans. Augmented by a bronze

Buddha, a large doll, and a set of big skittles, they made a satisfactory army, and, all being arranged, the Vice climbed carefully into the chariot, and the battle began.

It was evident from the speed at which Amir rocked that they were dashing along at a terrible pace.

Knowing that something was expected of them, Widdy and Venus remained *in statu quo ante*, but while Widdy sat up and took an intelligent interest, Venus lay down, grinned fatuously, and wumped the floor with his tail in an idiotic manner.

"*That's* Julius Cæsar—and he's not trying," cried Boadicea pointing at him.

The hint was sufficient, and the armour-bearer raised his mighty bow, drew it to his shoulder—and caught Venus fairly in the stomach. With a yelp of disgust the stricken Cæsar scrambled to his feet and returned to his kennel. Anybody who wanted him to play Romans some more, could come and fetch him. His demoralisation spread, and Widdy followed him, pursued by a grey-goose shaft.

"I think the wily foe have had enough," said Boadicea, several of the skittles having fallen. The bronze Buddha, unperturbed, was captured and bound to the chariot-wheels of the conqueror—and that was *that*. . . .

"Now I'm going to be the Standard-bearer of the Tenth Legion," stated the President, "also the Censurian. And the battle *may* end differently this time. Go and get that brown iron paper-knife from the drawing-room because its copper, and this is the Bronze Age."

The Vice obeyed.

"Make a jolly good Roman short sword," observed the President, examining it in this new light. "You'll have to be nippy with your shield, though—it's got rather an edge."

"I'll watch it," replied the Vice—using another of the unfortunate expressions learnt from Buster and his undesirable subaltern friends.

"What is your name?" he inquired. "I can't call you 'Thtandard-blarer of the Tenth Legium' the whole time, nor yet 'Cen-chew-rium'."

"Call me Reginald or Reggie, then," permitted the Vice. "No—Samuel would be nicer, I think, 'Samuel the Standard-bearer' or 'Samuel the Censurian' sounds all-right."

"Right O, Thammy," acquiesced the Vice, and prepared to do battle.

"No—you get in the chariot," directed the President, "and I come ashore in a boat. Then I hop out and make a speech to my soldiers who hang back a bit. They're not for it, at first, you know, and . . ."

"Can I take a pot at you while you speech?" interrupted the Vice.

The President considered this.

"It is a battle, you know," urged the Vice, "and I didn't ask you to come invading on my sands when I might want to be fishing or paddling or playing with my children or anything."

"Yes—but I've got to win, you know. It is History, and we can't alter that. . . . Tell you what—you can hit me in the shield while I am making the speech—or knock my helmet off. Yes—make it all the more real. . . ."

An empty drawer provided the Roman galley, and in the prow thereof proudly stood Samuel the Standard-bearer. In his hand he bore the S.P.Q.R. standard of the Tenth. It looked like a curtain-pole and a pinafore—but no matter. Nor matter that his helmet was frankly the paraffin-oil funnel with an ostrich feather stuck down its up-turned nozzle, his shield of card-board, his sword a paper-knife, his cuirass a tea-tray, and his greaves a pair of Daddy's leggings. The play is the thing—and Imagination is life and salvation.

Bravely he leapt into the waves, and turned to his daunted followers as an arrow smote his shield.

"Buck up, you fellows," quoth he, "a little wetting won't hurt you—*nor* spoil your bronze clothes. Come on, you're not salt nor yet sugar. A bath will do some of you good. . . ."

Still they hung back.

"Behold!" he continued, "I take the Standard of the Tenth Legion among the enemy!"

He did, and another arrow took him well in the centre of the cuirass ere the enemy, leaping

from the chariot, rushed upon him with spear and axe. Dropping the axe, the enemy seized the standard with a cry of—

“Leggo, Thamuel!—or die!”

Samuel did neither. He rapped the knuckles of the presumptuous hand sharply, and the enemy drew back with a yelp of anguish.

“Hop it!” cried the Centurion, pressing his advantage and prodding the retreating foe with the butt-end of the standard. “Bung off! Barbarium,” and the barbarian fled.

Leaping into the deserted chariot the Centurion said “Home” to a supposititious driver and poked out his tongue at the defeated enemy—and that was *that*.

III.

TOSH AND FUNNY-DOG.

III.

TOSH AND FUNNY-DOG.

THE difference between Tosh and Funny-Dog is the difference between the humour of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass*, or *The Hunting of the Snark* and the humour of a half-penny "comic" paper.

Tosh was dear to the souls of the members of the Junior Curlton, while for Funny-Dog they had a quiet contempt. If you talked proper Tosh you could stay for hours, but if you only talked Funny-Dog they did not mind how soon you went.

Buster was great at Tosh, but of course could not always live at the high level of real proper and genuine Tosh, and sometimes descended perilously near to mere and common Funny-Dog.

It was felt that he had done so, for instance,

when at a Literary session of the Club he produced as his contribution :—

There was once a funny old tolf
 Who spent all his time playing golf,
 He drove *on* to the linx
 With a naughty young minx,
 Saw his better $\frac{1}{2}$ and drove *olf*.

It was received in dead silence.

"There are points about *toff*, *golf*, and *off*," he suggested diffidently. "And about *drove on* and *drove off*. You know how you 'drive off' at golf, don't you?"

"We do," said Boodle. "We did it with some pin-fire cartridges."

"And then *this*—'better $\frac{1}{2}$,' is quite a new way of saying he saw his wife—his better-half—over her tea, or, if you like, bending over her tee on the green, you know. . . ."

"If you *say* it's very funny, Buster, no doubt it is," was the reply. . . . "Prob'ly most 'scruciating."

"Oh, no! I don't say *that*," the unhappy youth replied, "but well—it *is* Tosh, I think."

"Well, we won't *say* it's Funny-Dog, anyhow," conceded Boodle, and the matter dropped.

Daddy laughed consumedly at Buster's discomfiture. (He was held to have the right Tosh touch, and Boodle declared that he never lapsed into Funny-Dog, but she may have been partial and biassed in her judgment, for she loved Daddy "mos' tremenjous". Was he not so wise and clever and understanding that he was fit to take part in their games and able to enter into their imaginings and occasions, lawful and unlawful? So great and able a mind had he that he knew the utter unimportance of Grown-up things—like time, money, dignity, and silence, or being late for dinner-parties, must-go-to-office-now, mind-my-hair-and-clothes, not-quite-so-much-noise, and musn't-play-with-that. He was that sensible you would have thought he was a child, but for his size and his grey hair. In fact he was nearly as valuable, brilliant, and child-like as Mummy herself.)

When the Club held its Literary meetings, Daddy was expected to provide either Tosh or a Stirring Tale (plenty of good sound robbers, wolves, Red Indians, and things), but Mummy

was always looked to for something that made you feel good, and funny all over, and desirous of seeing and doing beautiful things as well as hearing the beautiful thing she was reading or telling or reciting.

What they loved best was some of Mummy's *own* poetry. Even if they could not understand a word of it, it was so satisfying to the ear, so musical and beautiful—besides being Mummy's very own. That was perhaps the chief element of the pleasure of listening to the sweet and sonorous sounds, the pleasing and satisfying rhythm. There was also the element of pride in the fact that not *all* children have a Mummy who can read them her own poetry. . . .

"Don't try poetry, Buster dear," continued Boodle. "You can't do it like Mummy. Make up a nice Tosh tale if you are going to talk Tosh. . . . I think the best Tosh I know is

'Three Wise Men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl.
If the bowl had been stronger
My story had been longer. . . .'

I love that. It tells you they were Asses without *saying so*, and it tells you they were

drowned without *saying so*. . . . I like jokes that don't have all the joke in the words."

"You put your finger on the point, President Sahib," remarked Daddy from the Club arm-chair, "and sum up a whole treatise on humour-by-implication. . . . Most learned President! A Daniel come to judgment."

"Don't *be* a Funny-Dog, Daddy," besought the flattered President.

"We nearly played 'Judgment' the other morning," put in the Vice, who was less bored by Literary meetings than might have been expected. There were always the Fairy Tales, and Daddy's lurid stories, and the better sorts of Tosh, not to mention the joy of hearing Mummy recite or read, or, best of all, say her own poetry.

"This is the story," quoth Buster, "of two other Wise Men of Gotham famous as *not* having gone to sea in a bowl. They were, in their student days, the Wisest Men in the University of Dantzig, and were very fond of doing so."

"Doing what?" inquired Boodle.

"Dantzig," replied Buster. "I have a cold in by dose. They spent most of their time, even in extreme old age, in Dantzig."

"But they were Wise Men of *Gotham*," said Boodle.

"Yes, and always dwelt there." They simply loved Dantzig in Gotham."

"*Is* Dantzig in Gotham?" asked Mummy.

"*They* were, Dear Lady, most of the day and all the night."

Mummy smiled.

"*What* were they, Buthter?" inquired the puzzled Vice.

"Dantzig," was the reply. "Dantzig all over the place. Dantzig in Gotham, you know. They Dantzed with each other, mostly."

"That's better Tosh," put in the President kindly. "What was the end of them?"

"Well—one lepped so much in Dantzig that he became a leper. A confirmed professing leper, and it was no good arguing with him."

"And the other Withe Man?" put in the Vice.

"Oh, he bounded in Dantzig, frightfully," was the answer. "Became a perfect bounder. People didn't like it. They were expelled from the Senior Curlton Club of Dantzig, who won't keep lepers and bounders. Not anyhow. Then the two Wise Men took up the cause of Pro-

gress. They progressed by leaps and bounds of course. . . .”

“What became of them in the *very* end,” pursued the Vice, tenacious ever, as Buster stopped.

“Oh, they sat under the famous Omelette Tree of Gotham and egged each other on, and poached. They also boiled—with indignation.”

“Poached what? Boiled what?”

“Eggs. They *scrambled* up the——”

“Funny-Dog!” said the Vice suddenly, and Buster collapsed. (Later the President told the Vice that he had been severe and premature—and in the presence of the President—a little presumptuous. He would have had a perfect right to make any comment had he been in the Chair. Privately the President entirely agreed with the Vice. The story should have stopped short of egg-puns. They *are* so banal, though *banal* is not the word the President used. In fact she used no word at all, but merely felt that egg-puns are distinctly of the Funny-Dog tribe and required a lot of elevating into Tosh.)

“It was distinct Tosh until you fell among eggs, Buster,” said Daddy.

"Yes," agreed the President. "Tell us it again without boiling eggs with indignation."

"Tell it like Miss Ha-Ha in the Higher Water," begged the Vice. "You know Minnie Ha-Ha."

And Buster, who had a well-known gift that way, burst into saga of familiar metre :—

"Two Wise Men that were of Gotham,
 You have heard ere this of Gotham?
 In a bowl went *not* to sea they.
 Loved they well their Universi-
 Ty of Dantzig and were always
 Doing it in season. Out of
 Season also did they do it.
 If you ask me what they *did* do,
 All that I can say is 'Dantzig'.
 Dantzig there in famous Gotham,
 Dantzig each one with the other.
 One he lepped so much in Dantzig
 He at last became a leper.
 Bounding so high went his brother
 That men said he was a Bounder.
 Said he was an awful Bounder.
 From the Dantzig Club they thrust them,
 Búnged thém fórh *něm ině cóntră*
Dí cěn tē yǒu'll únděrstand mē,
 Bút thís métrě spóils thě quánti
 Tiés óf thém thěre Látín wórdśes. . . ."

"Funny-Dog!" said Mummy suddenly.

And with a cry of "Comfort me, Old Thing!"
Buster laid his head in Boodle's lap and wept.

"Try again, darling," said Boodle. . . .
"What did they wear?"

"Breeches of Faith and breeches of Promise,"
was the reply.

"What is those?" asked the Vice.

"Well, when they ordered breeches and got them on tick, they were breeches of Faith, but when the clothes-cook took their measure and never sent the things, they were breeches of Promise," explained Buster.

"Why the cook, and not the tailor?" inquired the President.

"Because the tailor only made tales, of course,"
was the reply, "while the builder made storeys."

"What else did they wear?" pursued the President—being a Woman.

"Oh—lots of things—sunny smiles . . . an air of mystery . . . rue with a difference . . . worried looks. They lived *in* hope, and they lived *on* sufferance. But they were very just. *Always* just. Just about everything. Just about

to work, just about to pay, just about to repent, just about to wash their necks—but they were fond of saying ‘Well! I *never* did’—and they never *did*. . . . Their names? . . . Let’s see. There was ‘Ugo—who never went himself, and Alfred—who was really ‘alfblack. Their children were Percy Vere—who never did so; Og—who hadn’t a single H to his name because he didn’t want to be a Pig; Edward—so called because his beer always went that way. . . .”

“What did they eat—apart from eggs?” inquired the President.

“Well, they imbibed virtue and assimilated facts. They chewed the cud of bitter reflection and inwardly digested exhortations and were . . .”

“*Fed up*, I should think,” interrupted Boodle. “You’re off colour to-day, Buster. Sing us something.”

And lifting up his voice, Buster sang:—

“Never beat your Mother, boys, tho’ she is old and grey,
If you do not like her, show it in some other way.
No—*never* strike your Mother, boys, whatever she may do,
For, though she’s but a woman—she has feelings just like
you. . . .”

And was turned out of the Club forthwith.

IV.

BOBBALL.

IV.

BOBBALL.

As Boodle rode her sturdy little Arab pony down on to the beach that evening, her face lit up with pleasure when she caught sight of the beloved and admired Bobball.

Chacun à son goût. The face of Colonel Jones of the Rutlands never lit up with pleasure when *he* caught sight of Bob 'All, but then he neither loved nor admired Private Robert Hall. He gave him more C.B. than affection.

Bobball was a garrulous, plausible blackguard—but not the Compleat Blackguard, for he loved children. That he had won the devotion of Boodle and her brother, should stand him in good stead when his last Account is being made up. . . .

“Hullo, Bobball, dear,” quoth the young lady, riding up to where Bobball, seated pensive, pondered the seldomness of beer, the frequency

of Sergeants, the condemnability of India, and the ruddiness of things in general.

The Vice, aided by Ayah and Mowlah, toiled through the loose sand and joined the President, the servants retiring to a discreet distance.

Bobball arose, stiffened to attention, and saluted.

"Yore a soight fer sore heyes," quoth he.

"Have you got sore eyes, Bobball?" asked the President. "I *am* sorry. You ought to go to the chemist, and——"

"No, Missy. I'll go to the Canteen an' wash away all sech sorrers, byembye. Better'n the chimist," interrupted Bobball.

"Oh? I didn't know you could get eye-wash at the Canteen," was the reply.

"Lots of heye-wash in the harmy, Missy," laughed Bobball, patting Jock. "Lemme lift you dahn orfen yore charger, an' you two 'ave a buck wiv' ole Bobball—and then 'e'll go an' get dr—er—get some heye-wash. . . . Nice liddle 'oss that," and he lifted the President to the ground, and signed to Mowlah to come and take the pony.

"*Pukkaro 'im,*" quoth he, "an' lead 'im *upar* an' *niche* so as 'e don' get *tundah*. Naow!—don' *baitho* 'ere, *jao upar* an' *niche*, I tell yer, yer silly *poggle*."

"Don't you *love* horses, Bobball?" asked Boodle, as the three seated themselves on the sand. "*I* do."

"I loved one 'oss, Missy," replied Bobball. "I worshipped the graound as it trod on."

"It trod on me toe, once," he added reminiscently.

"Was it *your* horthie, Bobball?" asked the Vice.

"It were not, me lord," was the reply. "Not iggsackly mine. It were a race-'oss, an' it belonged to my Capting. . . . Ah! 'Ow I loved that 'oss! 'E won me a fi'-pun-note 'e did, and I 'ungered not, nor thirsted I, for a munf. . . . I didn't *thirst* any'ow. . . ."

"Tell us all about it," commanded the President, scenting a story.

Bobball removed the cutty clay from the midst of the thicket of his vast red moustache, screwed up his tiny grey eyes till they almost

disappeared, wrinkled his sharp short nose, and, so far as a recumbent person may, struck an attitude.

"*Kissin' Cup's Last Rice*," he ejaculated, and then in a falsetto, mincing voice continued :—

"You'd hask of the great rice, Sir,
When *Kissin' Cup* saved our 'Ouse?
As I stood in the Grand Stand that day, Sir,
I felt like a bloomin' l—no—*mouse* !"

"Wath its name 'Kiththing Cup'?" inquired the Vice.

"It were not," replied Bobball, "that spasim of po'try were what is called a proluminary canter. No—its nyme were Bill, an' a nice Christian sort of nyme too. *Kissin' Cup* ! 'Nough to make an 'oss feel faint. . . .

"'Ow I loved that 'oss, Bill! *And* 'ow Bill loved me! Wotsmore, Bill could unnerstand every word wot I said to 'im—an' when 'e was agoin' to run in a rice as the Capting *wanted* 'im to win, I allus 'ad to go to 'is stall, put my arms around 'is bloomin' neck an' say, 'Bill, I've backed yer *'eavy* ! You carries my little all,'

like that—all pathetic, wiv' a break in me little voice. An' Bill—e'd give a 'iccup of onderstanding and let a neigh which meant, 'Dear Master, back your little Bill, an' 'e'll be there or thereabahts.' An' 'e *would* too. . . . Then come the grite day when the Captin'g 'ad to win a pot o' money or send in 'is pipers, and 'e fair put 'is shirt on Bill, 'e did. . . ."

"Did he tie it round his neck?" inquired the enthralled Boodle, visualising the strange proceeding. "Was it a sort of—gage of battle, like?"

"It's a manner o' speakin', Missy," explained Bobball. "If yore Papa or Mamma goes racin', an' backs a 'orse 'eavy-like, they says they put their last shirt on 'im—see? On'y a manner o' speakin', o' course. . . . Well, the Captin'g 'e sends fer me and says, 'All, me faithful ole friend,' 'e says, 'go an' do yore best with Bill. Make 'im onnerstand that I'm broke to the world, stony to the wide, onless 'e wins terday. I'm done,' he says, 'an' if Bill fails me now, I shall make a beastly mess in my bedroom wi' my brains to-night.' Seizin' 'im by the 'and, I

wrung it till 'e 'owled, an' orf I goes to the stables.

" ' Bill,' I says to 'im, ' you carries the Capting's las' shirt termorrer, an' Bill—you carries my little hall as well,' I says."

" Your little *haul* ? " inquired Boodle.

" Yes, Missy, my little absobberlutely hall, an' b'lieve me or b'lieve me not—I stood to win a fi'-pun-note ! "

" How much is that in rupees ? " mused the President.

" I don' rightly know—but gittin' on fer an 'underd, anyhow," was the reply, " an' that little 'oss won it fer me! Saved the Capting's honner—an' pervided, me with the biggest drunk of a long and 'appy life. . . .

" Ah! Wot a rice that wos! I kin see it naow. . . . The flag fell. The 'osses lep forward. Neck an' neck they ran twice raound the course, an' you could acovered 'em with an 'ankerchief. Then, suddingly, hout shot two 'osses from the ruck, Kissin' Cup—I mean Bill—an' a rakin', hugly roan. Neck an' neck they run fer miles. Nearer an' nearer they droo to

the winnin' post, neck an' neck, level as an arrer, an' *then*, a few yards from 'ome, one of them drew six hitches a'ead o' the other. *Which was it ?*"

"Bill," breathed both the thrilled, enraptured children, as they hung upon the words of this Ancient Mariner.

"*No!* It were *not!* That rakin', hugly roan 'ad forged a'ead. 'E was good at forgin', I reckon, and there 'e was, winnin' by a short 'ead,—by a bare six hitches. There was Bill, six hitches be'ind, strivin' 'is huttermost, doin' 'is damdest, an' never a hinch could 'e gain! '*Ruined,*' I cries. '*Ruined!* An' the 'omes of me fathers alaid in the dust—not ter mention the 'omes o' the Capting's fathers.' In another second they would sweep past the winnin'-post with that rakin', hugly roan six an' three quarter hitches in front. I was jest about ter close me eyes an' breathe a prayer for 'elp—when be'old, wot did I see? *Bill shoved 'is bloomin' tongue out seven hitches, and won the rice by a quarter hinch!* There's sense for yer!"

Slowly returning homeward the children pondered the sagacity of animals and the depth of the incumbency upon mankind to treat them kindly, to love them, to understand and cherish them even as Bobball did.

V.

CONCERNING WILLIAM HENRY WINTER-
BOTHAM.

4*

V.

CONCERNING WILLIAM HENRY WINTER-
BOTHAM.

"You are sad, my Buster," quoth Mummy, as that man of war sat somewhat distraught, toying with his tea-spoon. "Second supper disagree with you at the Ball?"

"I am, Lady," was the reply, "for my young life is blighted, and though, apparently, I sit at tea in your delightful and hospitable drawing-room, in reality I sit among the shattered fragments of my wrecked and ruined career. . . . Second supper *never* disagrees with me."

"Who is she?" inquired Mummy forthwith.

"Mrs. Crickford-Crocker," confessed the youth.

"*Buster!* She's nearly old enough to be your mother," said Mummy, and laughed. To appreciate the joke one had to know the General's wife, Mrs. Crickford-Crocker, commonly known as Caledonia—because she ~~was~~ stern and wild.

When a new-comer inquired who the local Brigadier was, waggish folk would reply, "Mrs. Crickford-Crocker". Her husband commanded the Brigade, and she commanded her husband. In person Mrs. Crickford-Crocker was imposing not to say terrifying (unless really annoyed), being very tall, very broad, and very bony. Her cheek-bones were, like her thoughts, large and lofty, her hair was scant and sandy, her teeth obtrusive, and her eye bleak and piercing, a perfect gimlet.

The Brigade feared God and Mrs. Crickford-Crocker—save that in some cases it reversed the order of precedence. . . .

"Yes," agreed Buster, "and ferocious enough to be my grandfather. . . . I lived in ghastly terror of my grandfather when I was a child—of him and his black familiar, Woby Tijer."

"Wobitijer?" repeated Mummy, puzzled.

"Yes, Woby Tijer. He haunted my days and made my nights a terror and a night-mare. . . . My grandfather never struck me, never punished me in any way, never even threatened me—except to fix me with his awful eye (an

eye like that of Mrs. Crickford-Crocker) and say, 'Do that again—and *Woby Tijer*,' and he'd shake his forefinger at me and I'd wilt in terror, and look round for Woby Tijer. I expected him to spring on my back every time I went upstairs in the dark, and, when I woke from a ghastly dream of him, I used to lie and hold my breath, quaking, while I waited for his cold cold claw to clutch my throat. . . ."

"*Buster!* How dramatic! . . . But what did the old gentleman mean?" asked Mummy.

"I have since realised that the worthy old General was merely saying, 'Do that again—and *woe betide you*'. . . . What? . . . Well, Mrs. Crickford-Crocker has got it in for me, and I feel like I did when Woby Tijer was on my track."

"Tell me *all* about it, my child."

"Well, 'twas thus, dear Lady. I *knew* something would happen to me when you and Burgoyne-Fitzwilliam would not come to the beastly Ball. Fancy Dress Balls ought to be held every Saturday night. Well, I rolled up, quite pleased with myself in my black velvet, as Hamlet, and who should I see before my astonished eyes

but Mother Crickford-Crocker *not* in Fancy Dress, as I thought,—and she the very one who says that any man who goes to a Fancy Dress Ball in ordinary dress is a lazy hound, and any woman who does so is an unoriginal slut. Her own sweet words, I assure you. . . . Well, I was so flabbergasted at seeing her there in her usual dowdy, shabby style, only a bit worse than usual, that, like the silly Ass I am, I blurted out:—

“ ‘Hullo, Mrs. Crickford-Crocker, why aren’t you in Fancy Dress?’

“She just gave me one fearful glare, lasting about five minutes, and then snorted:—

“ ‘Insolent *puppy*,’ and marched off! And now I may as well chuck the Army, I s’pose.”

“But what annoyed her so?” asked Mummy.

“Why—I asked the same thing of Lady Peggy Hillyer and she *shrieked* with laughter. When she could speak she mocked my simple ‘*Why aren’t you in Fancy Dress,*’ and then squealed ‘The woman has come as “*My Grandmother*”’! I thought she’d have a fit. . . . How was I to know the old thing was got up as her own grandmother? I thought the spring-

side boots and cameo brooch and mittens and things were merely a slight accentuation of her usual up-to-date Paquin-cum-Worth style."

"My poor Buster—you *have* done it this time," agreed Mummy, when she had finished laughing. "The stupid woman must have thought it was a carefully studied insult!"

"Yes. She did. Shall I go and explain?" asked the ingenuous subaltern.

"Do," was the reply. "Go and tell her that it was a very natural mistake. Say she *always* looks so like her own grandmother that the error was natural and inevitable."

Buster groaned.

"I must go and play with the kids till I feel better," he said at last, and sighed wearily, as he rose to go upstairs to the Club.

.....
 "Venus is getting fat and lazy," remarked Boodle to Buster as they rested after winning the Derby—Boodle in the *rôle* of the King's Jockey and Buster in that of Favourite—the Vice and Amir representing the Also Ran fraternity. "He simply *wouldn't* take part in that

Derby, and he understood perfectly well what he had to do. He doesn't try. He grins when you show him his part, and when the time comes for him to do it, he just grins again and lies down and wumps his tail—and looks awfully pleased with himself."

"He's gettin' on, y'know, President Sahib," was the reply. "He isn't the lad he was. I don't know when his birthday comes round—but he's gettin' a bit long in the tooth."

"How old do dogs live to be?" inquired the King's Jockey, peering from under Daddy's cap, which represented the correct silk confection of the royal colours.

"Oh—some more, some less, some about as old as you," replied the Favourite. "We had a big black retriever, when I was a boy, who lived to be a frightful age. His name was William Henry Winterbotham, known as W. H. Freeze-me-tail for short. He simply *wouldn't* die—and he wouldn't be put out of his misery either. Simply hated the idea. My grandfather thought he *ought* to be put out of his misery, but not he, —he preferred to stay in it."

"Tell uth *all* about it—like a thtory, pleathe Buthter," panted the Vice, who had just been "placed" in the Derby (six times round the Club premises on all fours).

"Well—William Henry Winterbotham had been a grand sporting dog of my Grandfather's for I don't know *how* many years—and Grandfather loved him better than anything on earth, I think. He'd never been out shooting, or for a ride or walk, or drive, never been outside the house in fact, for about twenty years, without old William Henry Winterbotham. Then suddenly the poor old chap crocked up, went deaf, dumb, blind, and silly, and began to lose his teeth, hair, and temper. Grandfather *was* upset. He worried over that dog a sight more than he would have done over me, if *I'd* begun to crock up. He used to get a fresh doctor to him every day—and they all said the same thing—'We can't cure old age'. Fact was, old W. H. W. ought to have died long ago.

"At last Grandfather realised the truth—that nothing could be done for William Henry, and that it would be true kindness to put him out of

his misery. Sometimes a doctor would offer to do it. Sort of 'Dogs Painlessly Extracted' idea, but Grandfather would get purple at the mere thought of it.

" 'Sir!' he would say to the doctor who dared to suggest such a thing. 'This hand has fed that faithful hound for twenty years. This hand has fondled him and cherished him;—and no other hand but this shall—er—help him over his last stile.' That was the sort of way the old boy talked, y'know. . . . Pompous. . . ."

"What'th '*pompouth*'?" inquired the Vice.

"*That* is," replied Buster, evading explanations.

"As a matter of fact, it was a groom's hand that had done the feeding, but that's a detail."

"A dog's tail?" queried the Vice intelligently.

"Sit on your head, Vice," requested the President.

"Anyhow, *this* is a dog's tale, Mr. Vice," replied Buster, and the end of it is this:—

"At last poor old Grandfather screwed himself to the point of doing the dreadful deed, and he decided that as W. H. Freeze-me-tail had been a sporting-dog all his life, and a fine gun-dog, he ought to die by being shot, and not by being

poisoned like a beastly sewer-rat. It preyed on poor Grandfather's nerves so that he lost his sleep and his appetite—until, one dark and stormy night, he crept forth to do the awful deed of blood. He took his old army-revolver, loaded it in all six chambers, and, with tearful eyes and shaking hand, crept on tip-toe toward the stables where was the kennel of his faithful old friend. . . .”

“Why did he creep’ on tip-toe?” inquired the Vice.

“So that he should not wake William Henry Winterbotham if he were asleep,” was the reply. “He felt, in the first place, that if the noble hound came out, wagging its tail with pleasure, to lick the hand of its beloved master—that hand would fall in palsied impotence before it could do the awful deed. In the second place—if W. H. W. were asleep, how much better that he should never wake again. How much better that he should pass painlessly away as the merciful bullet crashed into his unconscious brain.

“Nearer and nearer crept Grandfather, and still no sound broke upon the stilly watches of the night. . . .”

"Had it thtopped?" inquired the Vice.

"Had what stopped?"

"His stilly watch?"

"No, my son—it's a manner o' speakin', a figure of speech, like. I mean there was no noise. No rattle of poor Freeze-me-tail's chain. He *was* asleep.

"Averting his face, closing his eyes, holding his breath, my anguished Grandfather thrust the revolver into the kennel, fired six times, and, then, sobbing, with bursting heart, he fled from that unhallowed spot. . . .

"But he was a man with a high and stern sense of duty. He would see the thing through properly. He would give poor William H. Winterbotham a proper funeral and attend it himself. So in the morning he arose, dressed himself, and went to take his last look at the dead body of his poor dear old faithful friend in the kennel. As he stooped with a tragic groan to look into it, W. Henry Winterbotham rushed out and bit him. Grandfather had missed him every time. William Henry Winterbotham is alive still. . . ."

VI.
THE STUART QUEEN.

VI.

THE STUART QUEEN.

"BAGS—I Tablo-Weevongs to-day," quoth the Vice, as he and the President went upstairs to the portion of the Club premises devoted to Literary, Sporting, Dramatic, and Social purposes.

"Right O," acquiesced the President. "Fish out the History Pictures."

The Vice preferred *Tableaux Vivants* to the Legitimate Drama as there was practically nothing to remember; one merely had to pose oneself gracefully in the *rôle* of the represented personage, and either hold one's peace, or "gag" as the spirit moved one.

In acting, as distinct from the *tableau*, there is such a dreadful lot to remember, what with appropriate gestures, prescribed postures, and ordained words.

"Let's do the Excruciation of Mary Queen of Thcotth," suggested the Vice, as they turned over the pages of the portfolio of Historical Pictures—a valued property of the Dramatic Society of the Club.

"Nothin' doin'," replied the President tersely, in the manner of Buster.

"Why not?" inquired the Vice. "It's eathy, and it weally only wants two."

"I know what you *are*, with an axe," replied the President, without considering the fundamental truth that only two are really essential to an Execution. "You'd be nearly as good an Executioner as I should be a Queen."

The Vice felt his muscles.

"I could have a card-board akth," he modestly suggested. That would certainly go far to counteract his terrible strength and inflexible sense of duty as an Executioner.

"Good idea!" quoth the President. "Let's get the lid of one of Mummy's big card-board boxes. I'll soon make an axe. Or, better still, let's nail a small square of card-board to a stick. There's a big photograph without a frame in the

drawing-room—it would make a jolly good axe-head—and it's not too stiff. . . .”

The photograph was unobtrusively borrowed, and put to novel uses. A low stool made an excellent block, and a rug did for the scaffold. Orders, squeaked from a back window, evoked Mowlah, who was ordered to bring a handful of hay. Little did he realise that it was for the seemly absorption of the blood of a Queen as it flowed red upon the gallows of Fotheringay Castle.

“It's straw in the picture,” observed the President, “but I don't suppose Mary would have kicked up a row if they'd brought hay.”

“No,” agreed the Vice, “and she wouldn't care if there *were* a meth—afterwards.”

“Besides, it wasn't her castle and furniture,” added the President. “It was Elizabeth's. She'd make all the mess she could.”

The block, axe, and straw-strewn scaffold being ready, the *dramatis personæ* made their personal preparations.

The doomed Queen erected an ill-constructed “bun” of her hair on the top of her head, for

the convenience of the Headsman ; pinned a large Union Jack skirt-wise`around her waist ; and made those preparations, as to the upper portion of her person, which usually preceded the washing of her neck. Being a Queen, she placed an inverted brass bowl over the precarious "bun" by way of a crown, but experienced considerable difficulty in preventing this well-known adjunct and symbol of Royalty from tilting forward and obscuring the vision of one eye. Being thus "armed and well prepared," she sank gracefully to the ground, in the attitude depicted, and awaited the Executioner. The Executioner had done himself proud. With burnt cork he had made an excellent simulation of a mask, and had given himself the kind of beard and moustache worn by all the Best Executioners. A condemned soiled-linen bag, inverted, and provided with three holes, gave full play to his arms and head, if not to his legs. On his head he wore, by way of a Black Cap, a small milk-saucepan. It was certainly black.

The Queen bandaged her eyes—or, to be

exact, one eye and a corner. She did not wholly trust the Executioner perhaps.

"There ought to be mourners about, surely, when a Queen is done in!" she observed. "Here, Venus, you lazy fat thing, come and mourn. You can do *that* much for your living, surely."

Venus came over, smiled foolishly, and licked the Royal nose.

"Stop it, you Ass," said the Queen. "You've got to *mourn*, I tell you, not giggle. Lie down, and look as though you have lost Hope or a bone or something—*go* on. . . ."

Venus wagged his tail and mounted the block. The Headsman's eye gleamed and he raised his axe.

"My faithful follower wishes to die for me," exclaimed the delighted Queen. "He can."

As the Executioner poised himself for the stroke, Venus saw his mistake and vacated the block.

"He has thought better of it," said the disappointed Queen.

"He's an *Ath*," said the equally disappointed Executioner.

"He's got to mourn, anyhow," announced the doomed Monarch, "or he'll jolly well get something to make him."

Venus turned round twice, lay down near the block, and heaved a long deep sigh.

"*That's* better, my faithful Rissolle," commended his mistress. "I knew you could mourn if you tried."

"No—Rithole was murdered," observed the Vice. "I wemember—because I *was* Rithole, and Buster was the band of murderers. He couldn't be here at your funeral when he's had one of his own."

"Quite right," agreed the Queen, and quoted "the faithful Rissolle slain'."

"He can be a Maid of Honour then," she added. "Venus, be a Maid of Honour—and try and look like one. . . . Get him that big doll's-nightdress or something. He doesn't look a bit like a Maid of Honour as he is. . . . And tie that black hair-ribbon on his tail, for mourning. . . . Now, I'm ready," and the Queen stepped on to the scaffold. Turning to the little throng of halberdiers, officers, retainers, ladies and gentle-

men in waiting, the Queen made her dignified farewell with the words :—

“ My Lords, My Dooks, the Captive cried,
Were I but once more three,
For ten good-nights on yonder hill
To aid my caws and me,
This garment would I scatter wide
To every freeze that flows,
And once more brain a stupid queen,
And all resourceless foes.

Yours sincerely,

MARY STUART,”

which was as near as she could remember to what she had heard Mummy read.

She then turned to the Headsman who, one regrets to relate, was spitting on his hands, the better to grip his mighty axe. (He had seen Bobball adopt that method when about to dig him a trench in the sand.) He overdid it altogether, however.

“ Dirty dog ! ” remarked the Queen, *sotto voce*.

“ Well—of corth—if Your Highety *wants* the akth to thlip and give you a fearful wump with the back of it, *I* don’t mind,” replied the Headsman.

"You'd better *not*," said Mary Stuart truculently, as she knelt and placed her head upon the block, "or I shall shed tears copiously. . . . They'll be *your* tears."

"Kindly bleed on to that thtrow, your Liege," requested the Executioner.

"I shall bleed just where I please," replied the Queen. "I shall bleed as much as I can too, and I hope it'll squirt all over the place. I hope it'll spoil Queen Elizabeth's carpet and furniture and make a mess on the wall-paper. Perhaps that'll teach her not to be so fast. She's too fond of chopping people's heads off. You can tell her I said so. . . . So there," and the unfortunate Queen laid her head upon the block.

The Headsman struck, and for the next minute the decapitated Queen appeared to be directing a stream of blood (much as a fireman does a stream of water) in an intelligent though truncated effort to make a little go a long way, and also to cover a wide area.

VII.
THE VIRTUOUS TIGER.

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THE VIRTUOUS TIGER.

"WHAT does 'a stitch in time saves nine' mean, Buster?" asked Boodle, as her guide, philosopher, and friend entered the Club in search of tea ere bearing his modest part in a Literary session of the same. "Daddy said it about his saddle."

"Well, the mother of eight once sewed—no, that's a different story. It's like this," was the reply. "There were once nine Virtuous Children, like you and the Vice, y'know, and they were being pursued by an Abominable Policeman. . . ."

"Whaffor?" inquired the Vice.

"Well, it is their nature *to*. It's a Law. Abominable Policemen do it to fulfil the law of their being—and Virtuous Children get pursued to fulfil the law of their *not* being—not being there when the Abominable Policeman arrives, you know. Do you understand?"

"No," said the Vice.

"Nor do I," replied Buster, "but this will make it as plain as yourself, Sir. (No offence, of course.) The nine Virtuous Children, secure in the knowledge of their unimpeachable and unassailable Virtue, fled with such dispatch that the pursuing and Abominable Policeman got the Stitch. D'you see? He got the stitch in Time and it saved the Nine."

"Good Tosh," commended the President.

Buster bowed his thanks of the appreciation of his effort.

"I know a lot about Virtue," he admitted. "It's like Beauty, you know, 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'."

"Don't be *vain*, Buster," adjured the President. "What do *men* want with beautiful eyes? 'Sides, yours are very or'nary."

Buster wept. "Misunderstood!" he wailed. *Mis-understood!*"

"Who was *she*?" inquired the Vice.

Buster positively yelped in his anguish.

"You wrong me, Gentlemen," he said, with quiet dignity. "Beauty does not exist until it is

seen. Same with Virtue. Virtue is in the mind of the appreciator. I trust I make myself clear. I once knew a Virtuous Tiger."

The yawn which was frankly distending the mouth of the Vice was nipped in the bud, if yawns do bud, or, to express the fact better, was stifled untimely. Tigers are tigers. Man-eaters he knew, and tigresses he knew, but what was this? Did it gambol friskily around the feet of its owner, a small boy; sleep at night beside his bed, guarding him from harm; give him rides upon its back, and sustain many and varied rôles in play-acting?

"What ith a wirtuouth tiger?" he inquired.

"A tiger Redolent of Virtue," was the reply.

"A *good* tiger. A really nice-minded tiger. A gentlemanly, quiet, steady, reliable tiger. A tiger you could trust with the joint. Quiet to ride or drive. No vice. Ridden by a lady—but no smile on the face of the tiger."

"A darling *pet* tiger," supplemented the President.

"Tell uth *all* about it, pleathe Buthter," besought the Vice.

"It is a sad tale," said the Subaltern. "It is like 'Gelert,' 'The Arab's Farewell to his Steed,' 'The Falcon of Ser Federigo,' 'Ginevra,' and that sort of thing. Poignant."

"Lucy Gray," murmured the President.

"Precisely. In fact that was the Virtuous Tiger's name among the Simple Villagers. Exactly.

"I met a little cottage loaf,
Er— . . ."

"No—that's 'We are Seven,' and it wasn't a cottage loafer. Cottage *girl*," corrected the President.

"Quite so. My mistake. But some *are*, you know. 'Specially in villages like London. Let's see. Lucy Gray. . . . Wasn't it she who dwelt in beauty side by side, or beside the cottage door—while by her sported on the green her giddy grandpa Might-have-been."

"No, Buster, it was *not*. But what about the Virtuous Tiger? Never mind the other Lucy now."

"Buck up, Buthter, pleathe," adjured the Vice.

“Well, gentlemen, the Virtuous Lucy, a tiger of blameless life, lived and moved and had his being, or his pitch, in some hills near a village called Soni, far far away from here, and was greatly loved and respected by all the Simple Villagers of those parts. It is said that such people are never grateful, but the Simple Villagers of Soni were, for I myself saw them at it.”

“But why were they grateful to a *tiger*?” asked the President.

“Because he was their Father and Mother and Protector of the Poor. He killed a black-buck or some other deer, not to mention the porkish wild pig, every night of his life—and the saving in young crops was more than you’d believe. I forget exactly *how* many tons of *jowri* and *bajri* and similar interestin’ things one healthy deer eats in the course of a stilly night—but it would surprise you. ’Normous quantity. The head-man alone reckoned that Lucy was worth a good Sandown tip to him in February; a winner in the Sandown Military Meeting in March; and in April alone, as good as a triple event in the

Newmarket Two Thousand Guineas, the Epsom Spring meeting and the Grand National. Fact ! In May that tiger was worth a win and a place in the Kempton Jubilee Stakes ; and as for June, —why in June he wouldn't have parted with that tiger for a dead cert for the Derby, Oaks, and Ascot. He wouldn't—not he. In July that beast was worth a Good Thing in the Eclipse Stakes and at Goodwood. When September came round, Lucy was worth a well-backed outsider in the St. Leger, while as for October, —in that month the kind animal was as good as top-hole luck at Gatwick, and a genuine straight-from-the-stable for the Caesarewitch and the Cambridgeshire Stakes. Believe me or believe me not. And during the rest of the year, that headman would sooner have lost his wife than Lucy Gray. A lot sooner. . . . Same with all the other villagers. They simply loved the Virtuous Lucy and hoped he might live for ever. He really was worth thousands of rupees a year to the Simple Villagers of Soni."

"Didn't he never eat none of them?" inquired the Vice. "Not even the fat little boys?"

"Now, my dear Vice," was the slightly pained reply, "what decent tiger *would* eat Simple Villager while he could get venison? Would you yourself? . . . No, he never dreamt of interfering with them in any way. It was a beautiful example of lovely Nature's pretty way of keeping—what is it?—the Balance of Trade or the Survival of the Fattest or something—the Simple Villagers tilled the soil, the soil yielded crops, the crops attracted the deer, and the tiger lived on them. Seems as though the deer were 'Also Rans,' rather, don't it? Anyhow, that was the happy state of affairs in sweet Soni, loveliest village of the plain, when a Traveller came to the Travellers' Bungalow—and nearly spoilt the show. He was one of those wretched beasts who always want to put things right before they're wrong—what's called a Member of Parliament in scientific language. And even among Members of Parliament, he was the limit, the ultimate outside edge. Believe me, he was a Rooter. . . . And for what fell purpose do you suppose he had come to sweet Soni, auburnest village of the Plains? He had come to murder

Lucy, the Virtuous Lucy, friend and patron of the sons of Soni. . . .

‘The Fathers of the City had met within their Hall
The men whom good King George had charged to watch
the tower and wall’—

In other words, the village *panchayet* had assembled under the banyan to see about it.

“‘Nay, brother,’ quoth the *shikari* (whom the Travelling M.P. had brought with him) to the headman of Soni. ‘Mad, he is not, but very, very foolish, a babe at the hunting and most wondrous ignorant. There is indeed but one thing to equal his great ignorance and that is his great admiration for his own knowledge and wisdom. Surely there can be no *shikar* in his own country. . . . But from *me* he will learn much, provided his folly anger not the gods. . . .’

“‘But he must not slay our virtuous tiger in the process of learning,’ interrupted the headman, and he clucked the cluck of uttermost negation.

“‘He will pay well,’ said the *shikari*.

“‘Will he pay the equivalent of all the damage that pig, nilghai, sambur, black-buck, chinkara and other beasts will do to the growing crops

night after night and year after year, throughout all the village cultivation?' answered the headman. 'Will he pay the value of the goats, sheep, cows, buffaloes, children, and women that will be killed if our virtuous tiger's place be taken by some old toothless scoundrel of a man-eater, who will not hunt for himself but will batten upon our flocks and herds and upon us? Not he! . . .'

"And again the headman clucked.

"But the *shikari* was not a villager of Soni and cared nothing for its fate. He was out for fame and fortune, and the man who gets hold of a Travelling M.P. and gains not both, does not deserve either. Many rupees and much honour (among Sahibs) would be his if he guided the feet of so foolish and ignorant an employer to the slaying of a fine tiger. His position was a sad one. It appeared that he must either forego his hopes of gold and honour or find that something most finally fatal had been put in his supper by the hospitable villagers of Soni. He could see no way out of the difficulty, but, being an Indian and a wily *shikari*, he could see one

6 *

round it. The foolish Wandering Sahib should *see* the Virtuous Tiger and have a run for his money, or rather the *shikari's* money, but shoot it, he should not. In fact, a miracle should be worked, for the foolish Sahib should depart from Soni bearing a tiger's skin, the Virtuous Tiger should remain in Soni wearing a tiger's skin, the good *shikari* would have rupees and honour, and the villagers of Soni much *baksheesh* and their Loving Lucy. Excellent—but what a lot of trouble caused by a little virtue! A hard case. Here was a Sahib desperately anxious to slay a tiger. Here was an admirable *shikari* to whom he had made known his desire—and his preparedness to pay handsomely in the event of success. Here was a tiger to be shot, at any time, by anybody who chose to sit upon a rock overlooking the well-worn tiger-path from the cave, and await him at early morn or dewy eve. What a conjunction!—and to be ruined by Virtue.

“‘Something must be done,’ he remarked to the headman. ‘You would not have him and his rupees depart forthwith.’

“‘Anything you please, brother,’ was the reply,

'provided no harm cometh to our striped Rajah of the nullah.'

" 'I must think. His tiger's skin is worth a hundred rupees to me, over and above pay and commission on *bandobast*,' said the *shikari*."

" 'Our Lord, the tiger, is worth a hundred rupees to every soul in this village—and we be many,' was the firm reply."

" 'But there is no reason why the Sahib should not *see* our Protector's tracks for a few days and be detained in our midst until he grow weary,' he added thoughtfully."

" 'Nor why he should not see the tiger itself, thereafter—when he begins to weary of seeing only its pugs,' suggested the *shikari*."

" 'None,' agreed the headman, 'provided he have not his gun with him at the time.'

" 'On my head be it,' answered the *shikari*. . . .

"The *shikari* thought for days. So did the headman. So did the *bannia* (whom the *shikari* sought and who picked his brains in five minutes). So did the police *patel*—who was a good man at such little games. So did the

good priest, who was a better one. So did the *kulkarni*. So did the schoolmaster, a learned man on nine rupees a month, and no bad hand himself at little games. So did the civil *patel*. So did all the adult male villagers and all the children. For it *was* an interesting and piquant situation—a Virtuous Tiger who must *not* be molested and a Travelling M.P. who *must* molest one or depart unmulct, with buttoned pockets. One thing was certain. Lucy must not bleed. Another thing was equally certain, the Traveller must be bled. . . .”

“When’s the tiger hunt going to begin, pleathe, Buthter?” interrupted the Vice.

“Well, my son, to make a short story long—the next time the Simple Villagers of Soni went up to Lucy’s cave with sackbut, harp and psaltery, praise and oblations and the carcass of a goat that had otherwise outlived its days of usefulness, as was their wont at the new moon—they didn’t. The *shikari* just took the goat up without any *tamasha* whatever, and presently after took the good M.P. for a quiet evening stroll to the very spot where Lucy, full of con-

tentment and goat, sat washing her face beside her cottage door. For the first time in his life the travelling M.P.'s tongue failed him, and he stood as though turned to stone. Then, when Lucy sat up, yawned, hiccupped, and put her paw up to her mouth as who should say 'Excuse me,' he turned and fled for his life, and then said it was for his gun. . . .

"There was dirty work at the cross-roads that night.

"The Simple Villagers built a *machan* overlooking the path from Lucy's cave, and, as soon as Lucy was safely off for her night's stroll, the *shikari* took the good M.P. to sit upon it and consort with mosquitoes, while he watched for the horrible Scourge. Nearly all night he sat, and had just gone to sleep when the *shikari*, who was sitting behind him, heard the sounds he had been waiting for. A minute later, he saw what he had been watching for and gently shook his sleeping employer.

"'Look,' he whispered and pointed. The good Traveller rubbed his eyes and looked. There, sure enough, beneath a tree a few yards away,

he could just make out, in the dim starlight, a huge striped animal! Raising his Express rifle to his shoulder, he shut both eyes and fired both barrels. There was a terrible roar, or bellow, or bleat, and the sound of an animal falling and struggling on the ground. A moment later, there was a sound of more than one animal struggling on the ground, for the good M.P., in his excitement, had leant too far over the edge of the *machan* and, perhaps helped a little by the wily *shikari*, had come down without using the ladder. Likewise the *shikari*, who with a cry of 'Run Sahib; run,' landed on the gentleman's stomach in a manner which in no way helped. Knowing the unwisdom of dallying around among wounded tigers (and Heaven alone knew how many there were by now), the Traveller took the tip as quickly as he could, and did his record travel for the *dák-bungalow*, guided by his faithful follower—who followed in front of course. After a stiff brandy and soda, the good gentleman sat him down to wait for dawn, by which time he had written a full account for the *Crumpington Courier* of his

slaughter of the far-famed, terrible man-eater of Soni.

"Meanwhile the Simple Villagers had got busy, and by the time the M.P. cautiously returned to the scene of his prowess, there was nothing to see but gallons of blood upon the trampled grass. But when Lucy came home with a headache after a poor night, she was gratified to find a calf, with two bullet holes in its tummy, neatly laid beside her cottage door. Equally gratified the next day was the good M.P. to find a fine blood-stained tiger-skin pegged out before *his* cottage door when he returned from a day's tramp with one of the search parties that had scoured the district in pursuit of the wounded monster.

"Great were the rejoicings and the festivities, and every one was happy. The Traveller, the *shikari*, the villagers, the *bannia's* brother who had sold him the tiger-skin, and Lucy, the beloved Virtuous Tiger of the sweet village of the plains."

"Good Tosh," commented the President.
"Let's play Shipwrecked Sailors on a Raft,"

VIII.

**BOBBALL AGAIN, AND A STUDY IN
CONTRASTS.**

VIII.

BOBBALL AGAIN, AND A STUDY IN CONTRASTS.

HURRAH! There was beloved Bobball, sitting pensive on the sand and gazing upon the mighty ocean, his short clay pipe protruding from the red burning bush of his huge moustache. The children ran towards him.

"Gorblessmysoul!" he ejaculated, as his saturnine face lit up with real pleasure, "I was a just thinkin' abaht you two."

This was untrue. Bobball had been considering the chaplain's phrase, "a waste of waters," as he regarded the separating sea, and thinking of how much he personally would do to remedy the waste, were it only beer.

"That's a nice lill' whip, Missy," he remarked, taking the rhinoceros-hide switch that Boodle had surreptitiously borrowed (in Daddy's absence) the better to correct Jock's besetting sin of laziness.

ness. "I usedter used one like that fer to encouridge Bill—that knowin' lill' 'oss I tole you abaht."

"Yes," replied Boodle, "the one that won the great race by a short tongue. . . . This is Daddy's polo whip. He's out visiting the Districts, so he doesn't want it just now."

"Districk-visitin', is he?" said Bobball.

"He's visiting the Districts," admitted Boodle.

"My muvver went Districk-visitin' onct," mused Bobball. "She took me wiv' 'er, she did, too. . . . It *were* a lark."

"Was your mother in India then, Bobball?" inquired the puzzled Boodle.

"No, Missy. She *were not*. She went Districk-visitin' in the East, she did, but it *were* the East End, an' that ain't no *mofussil* neether. That's in Lunnon, that is."

"I have been to London, Bobball," was the cold reply, "and there are no 'districts' in England. You don't take tents and go out into the 'districts' there, nor go 'up country'; and you don't have 'head-quarter stations' either. . . . Perhaps you are talking Tosh, though. . . ."

It was Bobball's turn to be puzzled. He gathered that doubt was being cast upon his statements. He licked a grimy stubby black-nailed finger and held his hand up solemnly before him.

"See my finger wet!
See my finger dry!
Gord cut my froat
If I tell a lie,"

quoted he.

"It's your fumb," remarked the Vice, observant and accurate. Bobball had used the term finger in a liberal and comprehensive sense.

"Streuth!" murmured the astonished Bobball. "Ain't you pertickler, Mister Sharp-Heyes? Wot I means fer to say *is*, that I'm a speakin' the Troof, an' when I *do* speak the Troof, it 'urts my feelin's, it do, to be doubted. . . . It's caused more'n a lill' onpleasantness between me an' the Colonel, it hev. . . ."

"If you're telling the truth, Bobball, we believe you, *of course*," said Boodle. "We thought perhaps you were talking Tosh, that's all. Now tell us all about it."

"I never talks tosh, Missy," replied the British soldier, in an injured tone.

"It isn't every one who can," agreed Boodle. "Tell us what really happened when your mother took you visitin' in the 'districts'."

"Wot I said, Missy, was that my ole muvver took me *Districk-visitin'* onct, an' so she did. Tracks an' all. All proper an' reggler. She Districk-visited the bloomin' clergy an' is 'oly missus—you know, sorter civvy's chapling, 'e wos. It were like this 'ere. My farver was a snob. . . ."

"Cocky? Stuck-up?" inquired the puzzled young lady.

"*Naow*, Missy—you know, a *mochi*, a cobbler. That's wot 'e was when 'e was sober, but as 'e was only sober a Sundays, trade weren't brisk so ter speak. . . . Love us! 'E *were* a terror, an' 'e lived 'appy fer years on meffylated sperrits, 'e did—flavioured, when luck was in, by beer, gin, rum an' other sech condimensions. Real sportin' Henglishman 'e were, an' 'ad 'is bob each way on hevery race as was run in the year. . . ."

"This is rather a putrid sort of story, Bobball,"

yawned the President of the Junior Curlton Club, who had a cultivated taste in such matters. "I wanted to hear about what *you* did visiting the 'districts' in England."

"Well, I was a comin' to that, Missy—but you're so 'asty—like all wimming. . . . Well, ole gaffer, 'e wants me to set-down-to-last wiv' 'im. . . ."

"Didn't he *think* you'd last?" inquired Boodle.

"It's a manner o' speakin' among snobs, Missy," replied Bobball. "'E wanted to set me dahn to the cobbler's last. Sorter happrentice me to 'imself like—an' 'im pinch wot I earnt. But, muvver says, 'No'. She calls 'im just abaht wot 'e wos, an' says I gotter stop in our room wiv 'er a makin' matches. . . . When she got too ill to go out a charin', she set all day an' made matches—to fill our 'ungry bellies. . . ."

"Matches is *bad* for bellies," interrupted the Vice.

"Mummy says her mother was a regular match-maker," said Boodle.

Bobball guffawed.

"Quite right, me lord an' me lady," said he,

“but she made match-*boxes* I should a said, and she gotter bob a day, she did, for the work o’ the lot of us—me an’ the uvver two kids. . . . An’ she wouldn’t let farver take me away from it neiver—she knowed wot ’e was—and I was worf a good tuppence ’apenny a day, I was, when I wasn’t more’n abaht eight years old. We wos terrors at matches, when it wasn’t too cold to feel nothink wiv’ yer ’ands. . . .

“And then the Revering ’Oly ’Ennery ’Opper’s bloomin’ well Missus from the tin chapel took to Districk-visitin’ us, she did. . . . There we wos, all of us eggsep’ the two bibies, workin’ away like devils to make seven bob a week for rent, coals, and food—the pore ain’t go no right to nothink else—when there comes a knock at our door an’ in walks the ’oly female.

“‘Don’ git up, my good woman,’ she says gracious-like.

“‘I ain’t got time to,’ says Muvver, practical-like. ‘*My* time’s took up wiv’ *work*—to get food an’ fuel, when I paid me rent,’ she says.

“‘How many hours a day do you work?’ says the ’oly lady, a sniffin’ the balmy atmosfeer of our

little 'ome—(five of us always in the room, there was, countin' the youngest biby, an' our clo'es an' beddin' wasn't wilets nor yet hotter o' roses, an' that bloomin' biby was *allus* ill, the aggerawatin' brat)—an' lookin' rahnd most disapprovin' like.

“‘Abaht twenty, as a rule,’ says Muvver. ‘Ow many does your She-reverence do?’

“The kind lidy put this question aside. She was out to hask, an' it shall be answered unto you.

“‘What's your husband, my good woman?’ was the nex'.

“‘A waster. A drunken, idle, wife-beatin', spongin' swine, your She-reverence. Wot's *yours*?’ ses Muvver.

“Again the kind lidy took no notice o' the question.

“‘This room's very untidy,’ says she.

“‘I 'ad a hidea it were,’ replies Muvver. I'm afraid all the maids 'ave got their day out, to-day. Would your 'oliness like to tidy it up?’

“‘Can you not take a pride in your home?’ says the good lidy.

“‘No, I can *not*,” says Muvver. ‘Will *you* come an’ ’ave five kids an’ a drunken ’usband ’ere, an’ live on seven bob a week, an’ show me ’ow to take a pride in it? Talk sense or go an’ ’inder some one else.’

“Then the ’oly an’ virtuous female talked to Muvver for the good of ’er soul, she did, an’ likewise she lef’ a track, a proper ’un—‘*Ow will you like ’Ell?*’ it were called. . . . Muvver said she’d prob’ly enjoy it fine after wot she’d ’ad in Christian England, she did.

“Goin’ dahn-stairs the kind lidy met Ole Muvver Skin-the-Goat. She weren’t so perlite as my ole gal.

“‘Good afternoon, my good woman,’ says the lidy to the abandoned slum-dweller, in ’er gracious way. Ole Muvver Skin-the-Goat she eyes ’er, cold an’ steady, fer a bit. Then—

“‘You be grycious to *me*, an’ I’ll ’ave yer back ’air dahn in ’arf once,’ says she. ‘Op it, will yer,’ an’ she p’int wiv ’er fumb. She *was* a wulgar ole lot.

“Well, this noble-’earted lady came agin nex’ week.

" 'This room and these children are no cleaner than they were a week ago,' says she, as though the least she eggpected was that we'd all got noo clo'es an' 'ad the room pipered an' white-washed.

" 'No—there's a week's more dirt on 'em, natrally, yore 'oliness,' says Muvver. 'You yoreself ain't no younger than you vos a week ago—but I got more sense 'n to say so!'

" 'That baby's nose is simply filthy,' says the lidy, ap'intin' to pore young 'Meliar alyin' on a sack o' rags, bein' ill as usual.

" 'Then fer Gord's sike *blow* it for 'er, Mum,' says Muvver, 'an do somethink useful terday, if yer niver did before.'

" 'The kind lidy sniffs as though 'er own nose could do with a treat o' that sort.

" 'Cleanliness comes next to Godliness,' ses she.

" 'Yus—an' 'ungriness come before eiver of 'em,' says Muvver. 'If you'd bin man enough to 'ave five kids yerself, an' they vos astarvin' before yer bloomin' eyes, would yer bung 'em up wiv Gordliness or cleanliness fust? Or would yer work yer fingers to the bone to git 'em food

an' a pinch o' fire an' a roof over their 'eads—their Farver bein' a drunken brute, an' 'im expectin' to be fed an' all?' she says."

Bobball paused to knock the ashes gingerly from his clay, upon his horny palm. Contrary to what one might have expected, the children were now deeply interested. Bobball's earnestness and dramatic manner held them spell-bound as they endeavoured to visualise a new idea, the tragedy of starving children.

" 'They ain't any on 'em 'ad nothing more nor a cup o' weak tea since yestiddy,' says she, 'an' they won't neether, till I got these boxes finished an' took to the factr'y. Would yer run along wiv 'em yerself, while I tidies up?' she says. But the good lidy 'ad nobler work in 'and, o' course.

"Then come the day when Farver done the best night's work e' ever done in 'is life. 'E got 'ittin' Muvver when 'e was too drunk to look arter 'isself, an' she shoved 'im dahn-stairs proper, an' 'e broke 'is bloomin' neck. Wasn't we all just 'appy neether! An' to fair put the lid on it, Muvver got a fi'-pun-note out of it, some'ow.

I dunno' 'ow—some Serciety or Beryl Club or somethink. Anyways we 'as a blow-out *and* a 'oliday, and she took us Districk-visitin'."

"At latht!" breathed the Vice, who had been waiting for such *dénouement* with patience.

"Yus. We returned the kind call of the good lidy, as was on'y right an' proper manners. The idea come to Muvver while ole Muvver Skin-the-Goat was asettin' congratlatin' 'er on 'er sudden and un'oped-for bereavement.

"'If that stuck-up grycious 'ussy of a Missis 'Enery 'Opper comes insultin' of you agin, you serve 'er the same,' says she.

"'No—I wouldn't like to go fer to sling 'er dahn-stairs. It wouldn't seem 'ospitable like,' says Muvver—a sippin' at the first cup o' gin she'd 'ad fer years. 'I know what I'll do—I'll spend me 'ollerdy avisitin' of 'er! I'll leave a bloomin' Track too,' she says.

"Ole Muvver Skin-the-Goat she stares as if she thought the gin 'ad got to Muvver's 'ead a'ready. Then she fair 'owls wiv' larfin'.

"'I'll come too,' says she, when she could speak, 'swelp me, if I don't! *We'll* be torfs

fer a chinge an' go Districk-visitin'—an' see 'ow *they* like it.'

"Also they done it, an' took me an' 'Erry an' 'Erb an' Horgustus an' 'Meliar. When we gits to the 'ouse, ol' Muvver Skin-the-Goat gives a fair rat-tat, while I plays a toon on the bell which was cut short by a femmle a openin' of the door. Like a 'igh class barmaid, she wos, wiv white bonnet-strings 'angin' dahn 'er back.

"'We've come to the Private Bar, Muvver,' says I, an' we all shoves inside, an' through a hopen door we sees 'er 'oliness and a kid 'avin' tea orf a little table, an' in we goes.

"'Don't get hup,' says Muvver, grycious like, in the same sorter way 'er 'oliness did when she Districk-wisited hus. ' There they sets wiv their mouth open.

"'Ow many howers a day do you heat?' inquires Muvver, a sniffin' the hatmosphere like the good lidy always done in our lil' 'ome, an' lookin' rahn most disapprovin' like. 'This room's 'orrible untidy. Can't yer tike a pride in yer 'ome? Why don't yer put hall these chairs straight—I 'ates ter see chairs hall of a

muddle. Why don't yer 'range 'em along the wall?'

" 'Wot's the meaning of this?' ses the good lidy at last, finding her voice and risin' to her feet.

"Then ol' Muvver Skin-the-Goat chips in. 'Wot's yore 'usband, my pore woman,' ses she. 'I 'ope 'e's in reg'lar work, an' brings 'is wages 'ome a Saturday nights? You know, if you wishes ter keep 'im houter the pubs, you must make 'is 'ome hattractive like for 'im, an' I means ter say yer must spruce yerself up a bit like, fer when 'e comes 'ome. 'Ave a bit o' pease-pudden an' a bloater ready for 'im, an' encourage 'im ter wash 'is faice afore 'e eats it. If 'e comes 'ome 'ere an' finds the fire aht, an' you likewise, stands ter reason 'e's agoin' ter foller yer ter the gin-shop and . . .'

" 'This is a houtraige,' ses the lidy, an' the kid begins ter snivvle.

" 'Some there are as calls it Districk-visitin',' ses Muvver, 'but praps yer right. *You* oughter know, any'ow. . . . That child's nose is simply filthy'—apintin' to the kid as was snivvlin'— 'an' wot's it 'owlin' for? Is it 'ungry or wot?

Can't yer tike a pride in yer children? Yer know this room an' these children ain't no cleaner than wot they wos a week ago. . . . An' look at that 'ole in 'er stockin'. Shorely you can 'ave self-respeck if you *are* pore. Ain't there sich a thing as a needle an' thread in the 'ol 'ouse? I expecks yer pore 'usbin' 'as to fasten 'is cloves to 'isself wiv 'nails. . . .'

"'Ereupon the good lidy fair drops the cup o' tea wot she 'ad bin 'oldin' in 'er 'and.

"An' when I sees wot she done I ses 'Gor-blimey, wot *'ave* you done?'

"'Look at that,' ses Muvver. "'Ow many times 'ave I told you as woful waste makes wilful want? You pore are the most himprovident class there is. . . . Nor the floor ain't the plaice fer the tea if yer don't want it. 'Ow many times 'aven't I told you as cleanliness comes nex' ter Gawdliness? . . .'

"'Ow! look at that,' chimes in ol' Muvver Skin-the-Goat, apintin' to a statoo of a naked femmle in the corner. I don' know wevver it were a 'oly saint or a gordless 'eathen 'ussy—but it was nood all the same.

“ ‘Disgustin’, I calls it. The trash you pore do waste yer money on! ‘Ere, ‘ang a hantimokasser rahnd the thing an’ be decent if you *are* pore.’

“ ‘Go,’ screams the lidy, tremblin’ an’ pintin’ ter the door.

“ ‘Wot! Yer don’ *like* ‘bein’ Districk-wisited?’ ses Muvver. ‘Well, I *am* serprised. Any’ow you jest read this track, “ ‘*Ow will you like ‘Ell?*” an’ we’ll call agin’ nex’ week an’ ‘ope ter find some improvement’—an’ hout we all marches lookin’ most disapprovin’. . . .”

Bobball mused a moment in silence.

“ ‘Ighly irreg’lar it were, an’ most unproper conduct on the ol’ gal’s part—but it done the trick orl right. We never got Districk-wisited no more. . . . Course your Pa’s Districk-wisitin’ may be different. . . .”

“ ‘Good Tosh, Bobball,” murmured the President, but the Vice had gone to sleep.

IX.
GRAPE-SHOT.

IX.

GRAPE-SHOT.

It was the President's birthday on the morrow, and, naturally, great preparations had to be made for the suitable celebration of so notable an occasion.

Not only was the Club to be particularly Sporting, Dramatic, and Literary, but it was also to be markedly Social and hold high wassail with cakes and ale—at any rate with cakes; or to be meticulously exact, with a Cake, a Birthday Cake of noble proportions and suitable inscription.

A special feature of the day's festivities was a series of "moving" *tableaux-vivants* to be staged for the delectation of the members, honorary members, and guests bidden to the feast whereof the said Cake was the *pièce de résistance*.

Subjects selected as being suitable to the occasion, to the limited stock of stage "pro-

perties," and to the number of actors, were in course of earnest and strenuous rehearsal.

"It's no good," said the President. "Both Daddy and Buster absolutely refuse to play Goliath. I am afraid we shall have to leave it out. I should look such an ass as David if you were Goliath ; everybody would laugh at David being bigger than Goliath. . . . It *does* spoil the idea a bit, doesn't it?"

"What did Daddy and Buthter say?" asked the Vice.

"When I told Daddy he had been chosen by the Committee—that's you and me—for a part in David and Goliath, he said, 'I'm a proud and happy man this day. I *am* a bit of a David when I get hold of a catapult. It must be a catapult, though. I am a rotten slinger, partly perhaps because I have never slung. Or if you haven't a catapult, I daresay I am still fairly useful at roll, bowl, or pitch. . . . That's it. . . . Give me a good ripe mango or a custard-apple, say, and I'll get a bull's eye or an inner every time.' But when I told him that *he* was to be

Goliath, he said he felt modest and not equal to the part. He said he'd make a rotten Goliath and the whole subject was a most improper one for tablo-vivong anyway."

"Doesn't he want us to act it, then?" asked the Vice.

"Not with him as Goliath," was the reply.

"Then I asked Buster," she continued, "and *he* said, 'All I have to do is to stand up and stop a rounded pebble from the brook and from your sling, with my marble brow'."

"*We* were going to use a marble," murmured the Vice.

"And Buster said, 'No,' it wasn't cricket, and if it was, he wasn't going to bat, nor wicket-keep, nor long-stop."

"I thuppothe *he* wanted to play David too," mused the Vice cynically.

"Yes," was the reply. "And he offered to ask Colonel Jones to come and play Goliath. Said he would add fresh laurels to David's fame, whatever that means."

"What about uth?" commented the Vice.

"You were to be the Philistine army and I

was to be David's family," answered the President.

"When I told him he could be Goliath or nothing, he said, Many thanks, he'd have a shot at Nothing as he felt he could do it rather well."

"Funny-Dog," said the Vice.

"Just what I told him," remarked the President, "and he wanted to pretend that he thought it was good Tosh."

"I suppose people *would* laugh if David were bigger than Goliath," she continued.

"I should," said the Vice.

"You *would*," grunted the senior official, perturbed in mind by the inexorable drift of circumstance. She did *not* want to be Goliath.

"I *thaid* I would," countered the other.

"Look here! *I* know," shouted the President, clapping her hands. "I've had such a good think. You shall have a pair of stilts and be Goliath! Splendid!"

The soul of the Vice sank within him. He did not object so much to playing a losing *rôle*, nor a dangerous one, but Goliath was a rooter, a swank-pot, a Bad Man and without one re-

deeming trait of the Good Egg. Nevertheless he faced the difficulty like a man, and howled with derisive laughter.

"Oh yeth," he jeered. "Two handths for the stilts, and carry my spear in my mouth, I thuppothe. . . . A spear as big as a beaver's wame—or is it a weaver's beam. . . ."

"I suppose I shall *have* to be Goliath then," growled the President, and added, after a moment's bitter reflection—"Don't see why *I* shouldn't have a sling too".

"Oh, you'll have a jolly great spear," comforted the Vice.

"Fat lot of good that'll be if I've got to be shot sittin'," was the reply, but even as she spoke, the fertile mind of the President conceived two bright ideas. The projectile should be of the most innocuous description, and she would duck unblushingly when it was projected.

"Come on," she said. "Dress up, and we'll rehearse."

Goliath appeared upon the scene garbed much as had been the Standard-Bearer of the Tenth Legion, save that by way of a spear great

as a weaver's beam, he bore with obvious effort a ten-foot mahogany curtain-pole, one end of which terminated in a most realistic spearhead. The one drawback to possession of this truly imposing weapon was the fact that it quite precluded the use of a shield.

David, as became a modest shepherd boy, appeared simply and suitably arrayed in a fur stole clasped about his middle and armed with a modern-looking catapult. Dangling from his neck was what looked uncommonly like a sponge-bag.

"Ready?" he asked.

"What have you got in there?" replied the President, eyeing her colleague's make-up with approval, and pointing to the bag.

"Pebbles from the brook," was the ominously simple answer.

"I thought so. *I'll* choose the pebbles from the brook," and laboriously depositing the mighty spear upon the ground, the President quitted the Club premises, rooted in Daddy's office room, and quickly returned with a small soft woollen ball whose proper use was that of a dummy golf-

ball by one practising the art of driving. So light and fluffy was it that the most tremendous drive would only send it a few feet.

"There's nothing in the story about Goliath choosing the pebbles," remarked the Vice, as he dropped the ball into his ammunition bag. He too had had a bright idea on the subject of ammunition—and anyhow the President had said that Goliath was going to duck. . . .

The antagonists faced each other.

"Bung off, Lanky," remarked David. "Hop it. Your face will scare my sheep."

"And who might you be, my lad?" inquired Goliath, adding in sepulchral tones,

"Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum,
I smell the blood of
An Is-rael-um."

"My name and address is David, the son of Jesse," was the simple reply.

"Jessie?" queried Goliath derisively. "What a silly name. I had a doll named Jessie, she *was* an ass. Is your father a woman?"

"My Daddy could do yours any day, ol' Goliath; and you're a *Phyllis* Tine yourself,"

countered David, and punned in somewhat bad taste.

"Go, Liar! Go, Liar!" he chanted, pointing.

"Nasty little Sheeny," answered the giant, and dropping his spear he crushed his helmet down over his ears until these latter stood out at right angles to his head, raised his hands palm uppermost, and waggled them beside his shoulders, rolled up his eyes, ejaculated "My! vot a pizness," and with an exaggerated lisp burst into derisive song :—

"Oh, Solomon Levi,
Levi, Tra la la la,
Poor Sheeny Levi,
Tra la la la la la la la la la ;
My name is Solomon Levi,
At my Store in Chatham Street,
That's where you buy your coats and vests
And everything that's neat.
Second-handed ulsterettes
And everything that's . . ."

Smack!! and Goliath's song died upon his lips with the suddenness of a cut-off gramophone.

In the utter shock of the suddenness of the surprise, he sat down suddenly and heavily, and

with a bound David was upon him and hewing off his head while the Israelitish army in the person of Venus cheered and wagged its tail, what time the Philistine array made known its presence beneath the form of Goliath.

"Golly! What happened?" asked Goliath, scrambling up that Widdy might breathe again.

"*That* wasn't the woolly golf-ball."

"No, it was a fat grape," admitted David modestly.

"I *thought* so," said Goliath licking widely. He pondered awhile, and, in the non-committal voice of one who reserves judgment, added: "We will now do Alfred and the Cakes".

X.

DRUMMERS AND RUMMERS.

X.

DRUMMERS AND RUMMERS.

"Do you like Bobball best, or Nurse Perfect?" inquired the Vice.

"Do you like treacle-pudding or sea-bathing best?" was the somewhat scathing reply of the President. "If you are hungry and hollow you'd rather have treacle-pudding, but if you are very hot and sticky and stuffy you'd rather go in the sea."

"No, I wouldn't," answered the Vice. "I'd rather have an ice-cream as big as my head in a pail of lemonade."

The President snorted, but the tenacious mind of the small boy pursued the subject of the comparative merits of Bobball and Mrs. Perfect. Inarticulately he decided that he admired the moral excellences of Mrs. Perfect more than he could do those of Bobball, while he loved the

human imperfections of Bobball more than he could love those of Mrs. Perfect. In fact it rather seemed that Bobball was one large human imperfection—and lovable, while Mrs. Perfect was one small moral excellence—and admirable.

“I wonder if she’s called Mrs. Perfect because she *is* perfect, or whether she’s perfect because she’s *called* Mrs. Perfect.”

“Ask her,” grunted the President.

But when they reached the spot on the sands where Mrs. Perfect was presiding over the picnic nominally given by Phyllis and Ethel, her young charges, she was quickly seen to be in one of her frequent moods which were quite unfavourable to the pursuit of investigations of a private and personal character. But faultily faultless, icily regular, and splendidly null, as she seemed to the children before the advent of Bobball, what words shall convey the correctness, propriety, and frozen rectitude of Mrs. Perfect’s perfection when that man of war and wrath hove in sight.

“Hallo Bobball, darling!” hailed Boodle.

"Come and have some tea and then let's all play pirates-on-a-desert-island, down by the wreck"—and, striking a piratical attitude, she sang in sepulchral voice that well-known old favourite of all the Best Pirates,

"Fifteen men on a dead man's chest,
Yo ho, ho! and a bottle of rum."

"Good a'ternoon, Mrs. Puffick, ma'am. I 'opes I sees you well," greeted Bobball, in propitiatory manner, as he gave his horny hands to the simultaneous embrace of a dozen small ones.

"Afternoon," snapped Mrs. Perfect.

"Ho yus, I could do with a bottle o' rum, Missy," continued the soldier, accepting the united invitation of the children that he would sit him down and be part of the picnic.

"Let's pretend the tea is rum," replied the little girl, "and you can be a dead man and we'll all sit on your chest."

"That ud be what you might call a rum go, Missy," returned Bobball, with an unexpected flight of wit.

"Rum is a deadly poison," stated Mrs. Perfect.

"Wisht you'd p'ison me wiv' it, Mum, when you've 'ad enough o' my company," replied Bobball.

Ignoring the remark, Mrs. Perfect addressed the children at large.

"I don't think I ever told you the beautiful story of the little blue-eyed drummer-boy and the bottle of rum, did I?" she asked.

"No," squealed the children in chorus. "*Do* tell us."

A story was a story even though it were a Perfect one.

"Yes," added the President, "and then Bobball must tell us one too."

Loud cheers.

"Once upon a time," began Mrs. Perfect, eyeing Bobball with extreme disfavour, "there was a regiment of good, self-respecting, total-abstaining men who never drank, nor smoked, nor used langwidge, nor caused their Colonel a moment's anxiety."

A strange sound, as of one who strangled, proceeded from the throat of Bobball, but as the

children turned their innocent, all-seeing gaze upon him, he coughed and looked into his helmet as one who suffereth in church.

"Now in this regiment," continued Mrs. Perfect, "there was a little blue-eyed, golden-haired drummer-boy, the sole support of his widowed mother——"

"Eightpence a day," murmured Bobball.

"—who had brought him up a total abstainer, not to use malt and spiritual liquors or tobacco in any form. Well, one day, as the Colonel came out of the officers' mess who should he see but this little drummer-boy, whose name was Horace, playing his bugle at the bottom of the steps——"

"They allus plays their little bugles there," murmured Bobball.

"—to give his kind officers pleasure, in his spare time. The Colonel smiled kindly and brightly at him and said, 'Step inside and have some refreshment, my little man'. . . ."

"They allus do—jest like that," whispered Bobball, whose face appeared to grow more and more suffused.

"—and led the way to where the officers sat at their wine——"

"Wot! Wasn't *they* total abstainers too?" inquired Bobball, in pained surprise.

"They were gentlemen," was the cold and crushing answer.

"‘And what will you take, Horace?’ asked the Colonel.

"‘Lemonade, Sir, if you please, and thank you kindly,’ replied Horace, who had very nice manners, as all teetotally-abstaining children have. But the Colonel was a gentleman who liked his little joke as the gentry often do.

"‘No, Horace,’ said he. ‘You shall join me in a glass of rum.’

"‘Oh, Sir, pray excuse me,’ said poor Horace in dismay. ‘I have been a total abstainer from birth, belonging to two Band-of-Hopes and a Mutual Improvement Society. My father was a Good Templar, Forester, Ancient Order of Buffaloes, and was buried with banners and a band.’

"‘Drink!’ said the Colonel, pouring out a tumbler of rum.

“‘Oh, Sir, I promised my widowed mother that never would I touch the accursed poison—no, not to save my life, if it was ever so.’

“‘Hear, hear, my little man,’ cried the officers who had gathered round, and prepared to take his part against the Colonel, whose conduct surprised them. But with a wink which reassured them, the Colonel put on a terrible frown and again pointed to the rum.

“‘Drink!’ said he once more, in a dreadful voice.

“Poor Horace fell upon his knees and raised his clasped hands to Heaven. How awful was his position! Either he must be guilty of an offence against military discipline, or he must break his word to his mother and go against his lifelong convictions.

“‘Oh, Sir, I cannot,’ he cried.

“‘Drink!’ roared the Colonel. ‘Drink or die!’ and he pulled a loaded pistol from his belt——”

“They allus carries loaded pistols in their belts,” corroborated Bobball, in a whisper, adding, as an afterthought, “and p’isoned daggers in their braces.”

“—and pointed it at Horace’s head.

“‘You drink that rum, or I blow out your brains,’ growled the Colonel, taking out his watch. ‘I give you two minutes.’

“‘May I spend it in prayer, Sir?’ asked the boy, ‘for I shall never drink that rum.’

“The Colonel swallowed hard and nodded, and the officers turned away.

“Horace said his prayers, and as he finished up, ‘Please bless Colonel Jones, and make him a teetotaller,’ the Colonel could bear it no longer. Throwing his arms round Horace, he burst into tears and hurried from the room.

“It was a cruel joke and in a way it brought its punishment, though Horace forgave him. That night the Colonel became a teetotaller and all the officers signed the pledge——”

“Blimey!” whispered Bobball under his breath.

“—Shortly after, the Colonel caught a chill and was taken very ill indeed. The doctor was sent for.

“‘What you want is a glass of good hot rum,’ said he.

"‘No, doctor, I’d sooner die,’ replied the Colonel.

"The doctor laughed, and had the hot rum prepared.

"‘Drink!’ said he.

"‘I cannot,’ replied the Colonel, ‘I promised Horace.’

"‘Drink or die,’ repeated the doctor, holding out the rum.

"The Colonel feebly shook his head—and *died*——"

"Nat’rally!" commented Bobball. "Serve ’im right."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Perfect," said the President, and turned with relief and hope to Bobball.

"Now you tell us one, darling Bobball," she besought.

"Well, Missy," replied Bobball, producing a tin tobacco box and a cutty clay. "I ain’t wot you might call a thorough-paced uncorrigible story-teller—like Mrs. Puffick, but has it so ’appens, I also knows a little story about a drummer-boy likewise. But ’is name weren’t

'Orrice, an' 'e 'adn't got no blue eyes nor golden 'airs. 'Is name was called Cully 'Ookit, an' 'e had black eyes—most days o' the week any'ow—an' black 'air where 'e weren't bald, an' 'e wasn't the support o' no widowed muvver neither. No,—'e'd gorn an' deserted 'er, 'e 'ad, just acause she'd burnt 'is face wiv a fryin'-pan an' bashed 'im a bit wiv a poker, through gettin' delirious trimmings, 'er bein' partial to a drop o' gin——"

"Disgusting," murmured Mrs. Perfect.

". . . an' a bit o' exercise a-Saturday nights. No, 'e weren't no golden-eyed 'Orrice, but the funny thing abaht it is, that when 'e run away an' went fer a sojer, 'e must a 'listed in the Fifes an' Drums o' the werry same Regiment as 'Orrice once adorned, as Mrs. Puffick so truly told yer——"

Mrs. Perfect sniffed.

"There couldn't a bin two sich Regiments, so it *must* a bin the same one—all good, self-respectin', total-abstainin' men, as never drank nor smoked nor used langwidge nor caused their Colonel a moment's anxiety. Six 'undred an' fifty of 'em, there was, an' six 'undred an'

forty-nine was R.A.T.A., the one an' honly hexception bein' that wicked Cully 'Ookit. Did 'e sit hon the steps o' the Hofficers' Mess a playin' of 'is little bugle in 'is spare time to give 'is kind Orficers pleasure, as 'Orrice 'ad useter do? Not 'alf 'e didn't. Ho no! I *don't* fink. No, all 'is spare time was a took up in the Canteen where 'e loved ter set an' 'ear the pop o' the ginger-beer an' lemonade bottles a bein' opened for the good, self-respectin', total habstainin' men as was in the 'abit of rottin' their g— . . ."

Mrs. Perfect coughed loudly.

"—good hinteriors wiv sich gashious swipes. An' one day that abandoned young bloke, Cully 'Ookit, wot did 'e do but walk inter the Canteen, plank down 'alf a rupee, say as 'ow 'e were froze to 'is marrer along o' fallin' in the water when fishin', an' called fer a go o' rum, 'ot, *wiv*. Strike me purple! You should ha' seen the commotion there was in that Regiment o' good, self-respectin', total habstainin' men! Talk abaht never givin' their Colonel a moment's anxiety! Five 'undred of 'em run straight off to 'is bungalow to tell 'im wot 'ad 'appened, one 'undred

ran fer the chaplin', forty sloped fer the doctor, an' the remainin' nine mounted guard over Cully 'Ookit an' the eight pennoth o' 'ot rum as the astounded barman 'ad give 'im before he knowed wot 'e was a doin' of.

"In spite o' the fact that the Regiment 'ad got its route an' was entrainin' fer the Plains in the mornin', the Colonel drops heverything an' hups an' leaves 'is work an' rushes dahn ter the Canteen, follered by all the hofficers. Wot a sight meets 'is 'orrified heye. There, at the bar, stood Cully 'Ookit, an' in 'is 'and a steamin' glass o' the best!

"*'Put it dahn or die,'* roars the Colonel.

"*'Ho Sir, I cannot,'* whimpers the little drummer-boy, aturnin' one black heye hup to 'Eavin' while akeepin' the uvver on the Colonel.

"*'Put it dahn or die,'* again roars the Colonel, pluckin' a loaded revolver from 'is belt an' lookin' to the primin' thereof, while hall the hofficers turns their 'eads away.

"*'Ho Sir! pray excuse me,'* said pore 'Ookit in dismay. *'It's too bloomin' 'ot.'*

"*'Fer the last time,'* roars the Colonel, pre-

sentin' the pistol at pore 'Ookit's 'ead—'put it dahn hor die. . . .'

"And in three gulps pore 'Ookit puts it dahn, aburnin' 'is little blue-eyed throat most 'orrible in so doin'.

"'Faithful to the last,' he cried. 'I 'ave obeyed your cruel orders though it scald my stummick so to do'—and 'e fell at 'is Colonel's feet dead . . . drunk."

Mrs. Perfect snorted.

"Drunk he were, drunk all night 'e remained, an' so drunk 'e was in the mornin' that 'e couldn't git up—an' the regiment entrained while 'e lay wrop in swinish slumber. So wrop he were that when 'e reached the station the train 'ad gorn, bearin' those six 'undred and forty-nine good, self-respectin', total habstainin' men to their 'orrible doom. For a havalanche crashed dahn upon that train, leavin' only Cully 'Ookit of all that battalion to tell the awful tale. . . ."

Bobball sighed, and pressed down the tobacco in his pipe. "The tale's called '*Saved by a Glass o' Rum*,'" added Bobball, as he struck a match and avoided the eye of Mrs. Perfect.

XI.
THE RAFTERS.

XI.

THE RAFTERS.

"I WONDER how you Cast Lots, Bo'sun?" remarked the President, turning to the Vice who was scanning the weary horizon for a sail. (They were shipwrecked mariners on a raft in mid-ocean, and their provisions were reduced to three chocolates in silver paper, a lunch biscuit and a slice of apple rapidly losing its healthy pallor in favour of an unwholesome brownness.)

"I thuppothe you cast lots of things overboard," was the sensible reply. "But there's nothing to cast," he added, in the weak, faint, hopeless voice proper to one who has suffered the last extremes of hunger and thirst for thirty days (including thirty nights).

"Don't be a Fat-head, Bo'sun," said the Captain, with some asperity. "When you Cast Lots, you don't cast lots of something, you just Cast Lots."

"Lots of nothing?" inquired the Bo'sun patiently. "Why?"

"Why, to see who eats the other," was the reply.

"We have only one more meal for you and me and none for the crew, so we must Cast Lots, and the one who wins is eaten by the rest—unless of course anybody is decent enough to offer himself."

"A *lot* of himself?" asked the Bo'sun, and added, "Perhaps the Crew would," as he turned and patted the Crew's head.

Venus was the Crew, and was understood to decline to play the *rôle* of Universal Provider in addition. Certainly he shook his head violently when invited to have his throat cut.

"Anyhow," said the Captain, "we can Cast the Lot on him, so he might just as well have been a sport and died to save us, with a smile."

"How could he save us with a smile?" inquired the Bo'sun.

"You've been drinking salt water, my lad," was the unkind reply. "I told you you'd go mad if you did that."

The Crew got up, yawned, shook himself again and took a stroll around the raft—which looked uncommonly like an inverted four-legged table.

“Oh, look at that wretched Crew, he’s gone and sat on the food. He did that on purpose so that we should give it him,” yelled the anguished Bo’sun, pointing to where Venus was apparently playing at being a hen with chicks.

“That settles it,” said the Captain wrathfully.

“The Crew shall be fattened up on the lunch biscuit and the slice of apple, and then the Lot shall be Cast upon him. We can still eat the chocolates as they’re wrapped in silver paper.”

The Crew, either ignorant of its fate, or truly philosophic, disposed of the offered biscuit in two gulps, but apparently reserved the slice of apple for even more parlous times. And as with fatuous smile and self-satisfied tail waggings the Crew perambulated the raft, the Captain laboriously scrawled with fateful pencil upon an old luggage label the ominous words LOT I. Having done this to his satisfaction, the Captain directed the Bo’sun to seize and secure the Crew

preparatory to the ceremony of casting. Nothing loth, the Bo'sun precipitated himself upon the Crew, who in the joy of his heart that such charming activities should break the monotony of the terribly weary life upon the raft, dived between the Bo'sun's legs, upset him and proceeded to roll upon him, with snuffling snorts. And as Crew and Bo'sun grappled in a terrible struggle, the Captain standing aloof, mystic, sibylline, murmured the words, "Behold, I Cast Lots," and flung the fateful document at the Crew. But the Crew was in the very act of leaping back for a fresh rush-and-worry at his prostrate assailant, and the Lot fell on the Bo'sun.

Petrified with horror, the three froze to a dreadful silence, even the Crew apparently impressed with a sense of the magnitude unmeasured, of some great disaster. The Captain was the first to speak.

"Golly!" he cried. "I'm awfully sorry, Bo'sun, but you're *It*. You're luck's clean out to-day. What rotten Kismet you do have. The Lot fell on you all right, smack in the middle of your chest."

The Bo'sun fetched a deep groan.

"Never mind," quoth he. "If you're going to eat me I may as well eat the chocolates."

"Not at all," replied the Captain, appalled at such faulty logic. "Is it likely I should want to eat you while I've got chocolate?"

"But if I eat the chocolates and you eat me, you'll get 'em all the same," argued the Bo'sun.

"Don't be a Funny Dog," growled his incensed senior. "And anyhow, I shall want the chocolates to take the taste of you out of my mouth."

"And the slice of apple?" asked the doomed man.

"The Crew 'll want that," was the reply. "Besides, he sat on it."

"Is the Crew going to have some of me too?" asked the Bo'sun, with morbid interest.

"Of course," was the reply.

"Then I don't see why he should have the apple," continued the Bo'sun. "Crews don't mind nasty tastes; they don't care what they eat. Besides, he only sat on one side of it and I can eat down to that."

"Then take your last meal on earth, unhappy man," said the Captain, in voice appropriate.

"On water," corrected the Bo'sun, with irritat-

ing precision, as he reached for the apple. "I'm not an unhappy man," he added, munching appreciatively.

"You soon will be," promised the Captain, as he ceased peeling a chocolate, to tap significantly the heavy sheath knife (or paper knife) at his belt.

No further word broke the brooding silence of the raft until the Captain had finished peeling the chocolates, laid them out before him, a post-prandial *bonne bouche*, produced his pipe, struck a match, affected to light it and cast an experienced eye at the weather.

"Prepare to die, Bo'sun," said he suddenly.

"Haven't finished my apple," replied the Bos'un. "If you wait a little while I shall taste all the sweeter. Eat a couple of chocolates now and keep one to take my taste away afterwards."

The Captain considered the request, and seemed to be viewing it and the chocolates with favourable eye.

"Which joints of me will you eat, and which will you give the Crew?" asked the Bo'sun, meditatively eyeing his fat legs and arms.

"Oh, cutlets, steaks, leg of Bo'sun, shoulder of Bo'sun, and that sort of thing for me, you know," replied the Captain. "The crew can have scrag end, head, liver and bacon, devilled kidney. . . . There'll be plenty."

"Wonder if I shall be tough," mused the Bo'sun. "Anyhow, I'll be as tough as I jolly well can," he added.

"*That's* a nice spirit to die in," commented the Captain coldly, selecting his second chocolate. "A real sportsman would trail over the side in the water and soften himself."

"Yes, and get eaten by a shark," sneered the Bo'sun.

An idea struck him even as he spoke, and the somewhat peevish and petulant look (with which he had watched the Captain's sharpening of his sheath-knife and his setting forth of plate, knife and fork) changed to one of bright hope.

"I will do it," he cried, and rolling off the raft clung to the side thereof, while the Captain set about the preparation of a fire.

A blood-curdling shriek and bubbling cry as of some strong swimmer in his agony brought him

to the side of the raft as the Bo'sun, like Yser, rolling rapidly, toward the door, howled: "A whale! A whale! I am being eaten alive; the beastly thing has bitten me in halves."

"How rotten," said the Captain, eyeing the rotating Bo'sun dubiously. "I suppose I *must* eat the Crew now," and turned in time to see the last chocolate disappear, enfolded in the long, pink tongue of that treacherous and greedy insubordinate. With a yell of rage the Captain drew his sheath-knife and sprang at the Crew with so flashing an eye and menacing a mien that the Crew leapt overboard and swam in the direction of the body of the Bo'sun, namely, towards the door which—even as the Captain smote his forehead with a cry of "Ruined! Starvation stares me in the stomach"—opened to admit Buster beneath whose arm there shone refulgent a mighty box of butter-scotch.

"Saved!" cried the Captain, raising his hands and upturned beatific face to Heaven.

"Golly! So am I," echoed the Bo'sun, rising like Venus from the waves, or a second Jonah from the temporary accommodation afforded by the whale.

XII.

THE VEGETARIAN MUGGER OF SONI.

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"DID you ever know any other Virtuous Wild Beasts, besides the Virtuous Tiger of Soni, Buster?" asked the President one day, as they waited for Daddy and Mummy to arrive and make a quorum.

"Lots," was the reply. "The Colour-Sergeant of——"

"No," interrupted the President, "not Tosh now. I want to hear *all* about the Virtuous Tiger of Soni again—unless you know any others. I love Virtuous Beasts."

"Well—there was the Vegetarian Mugger who, in a way, avenged the intended murder of poor Lucy Gray," was the reply.

"A vegetarian crocodile! Why, *Buster*, I thought they were the worstest beasts in the world, and *always* ate you up, and then shed

crocodile tears about it. *Are* you trying to talk Tosh?"

"No, this is really truly. By a ford of the Soni River dwelt an *eenormous* crocodile. I saw it several times myself. And if not a really strict fruitarian and vegetarian, it, at any rate, *never* took anything stronger than fish. Meat it could not abide."

"If this turns out to be Tosh, I shall be angry with you, Buster," said the President, who was still sceptical. "I want a tale."

"No—this is Honest Injun. Honestest Injun as ever was. There *are* fish-eating crocodiles, you know. Live on fish altogether. Have conscientious objections to taking the life of a dumb animal. . . ."

"Fishes is dumb animals," interjected the Vice. "We kept some once. I heard them be dumb."

"Quite so, Mr. Vice," assented Buster. "But are they exactly *animals*, so to speak?"

"They're not vegetables nor minerables," opined the President.

"Look here—you little dev—I mean darlings, —are too much for me," said Buster. "This

mugger ate fish, the whole fish, and nothing *but* fish, anyhow. He was a strict vegetarian, in the sense that he never ate butcher's meat—so I maintain that he was a Vegetarian Crocodile and, to that extent, a conscientious, and therefore a Virtuous Crocodile. Also he was instrumental in avenging poor Lucy Gray."

"Did he think the Traveller looked fishy and eat him?" asked Boodle.

"No—he did much better than just *eat* him. He made him look an ass!" was the reply.

The children settled down firmly to hear the thrilling true tale of *How the Vegetarian Mugger of Soni made the Travelling M.P. look an Ass*.

"Well, it was like this, dear old Things," began Buster. "The headman of Soni, to whom Lucy Gray was worth such a lot, simply *loathed* the Travelling M.P. He hated him for trying to shoot Virtuous Lucy like you'd hate anybody who came along and shot Venus, and then wagged his tale as though he'd done something you oughter be very pleased about. But of course he dared not show the Traveller that he hated him, and that made him hate him all the

more. Then, one day, almost before Lucy's understudy was cold in his grave and the laughter-tears of the Simple Villagers dry upon their cheeks, this Member—or Limb—of Parliament suddenly sent for the headman and told him, through his butler, that he was going to confer *another* blessing upon the village. The poor headman fetched an awful groan at hearing this good news, and said he felt that they ought to name the village after their benefactor.

“‘To-day I saw one of those Dread Scourges of your rivers, a terrible reptile that has batted and fattened upon you and your wives, your sons and your daughters, upon your flocks and herds, your men-servants and your maid-servants, your oxes and your asses, for ages. Make arrangements, tie up a calf or a goat by the water-side, and I will also slay *this* monster,’ said he. Then he told his ‘Travelling-butler’ to translate exactly what he had said.

“‘The Sahib wants to shoot a mugger. Make *bundobust*,’ said the butler.

“‘But there is only *one* mugger in these parts,’ said the poor headman. ‘There *is* only Grand-

father, who lives by the ford—and he has been there for a thousand years at least. He is *very* holy. Why murder *him*?’

“‘Make *bundobust*,’ said the butler. ‘Tie up a goat.’

“‘But our Grandfather would never touch flesh!’ said the headman. ‘He is a Brahmin among crocodiles and *very* holy.’

“‘What does the worthy fellow say?’ asked the Travelling M.P.

“‘He is calling blessings upon the head of your Honour, the Protector of the Poor, and says the goat will be ten rupees.’

“‘Very well,’ said the P.O.P., ‘I will shoot the savage saurian before breakfast to-morrow.’

“‘What does the Presence say?’ asked the headman.

“‘He says he will give you one rupee for the goat, and the mugger must be there early in the morning,’ said the butler, whose name was Truthful James, he having consorted long with travelling Limbs of Parliament. . . .”

“Don’t talk like a Grown-up, Buster,” besought the President, “or you’ll spoil the story.”

"Sorry, Madam. Well—the poor but honest headman, being only a Simple Villager, smiled at the back of his simple mind.

"‘It shall be as the Huzoor orders,’ said he.

"And he went forth. Then he went fifth—to the *shikari* of the village. Then they went nap—on the Vegetarian Mugger of Soni.

They made a lovely *machan* place for the Travelling M.P. to sit on—where there was no shade but plenty of nice glare, and then, on a sand-bank, right in the very spot where their vegetarian Grandpa was wont to come daily and bask in the sun, they drove a strong stake. And all the people smiled and said ‘Amen’ . . .”

"A strong steak of goat?" inquired the President.

Buster laughed.

"No, a strong stake of wood. The kind you use for burning holy martyrs and things. Then they got a stout cord, and, from a thin iron rod, the village blacksmith made a very big strong hook. Well, next morning, down to the ford marched the Travelling M.P. with his rifle, to rid the village of *this* Frightful Scourge also.

Then the headman and the *shikari* showed him how good they'd been, and produced the rope and the big hook and explained, by signs and wonders, that they would tie the rope to the stake and fasten the hook to a pariah-dog. *Then* when the Frightful Scourge rushed out of the water, roaring, with flashing eyes, lashing its tail and flapping its ears, it would see the pi-dog, snap him up in its terrible jaws, and swallow both him *and* the hook.

"*Then* while the fearful reptile was unavoidably detained by the stake, rope, and hook, the intrepid sportsman could take pot-shots at it until he *did* hit it.

"The Travelling M.P. smiled upon them. He beamed hard to show his good-will, approval, and intelligence.

"Then the *shikari*, accompanied by Faithful Fido, the village pi-dog, went and tied the rope to the stake. Then he suddenly grabbed Faithful Fido and drove the hook through the scruff of his neck, and F.F. made himself perfectly miserable about it. He also made the welkin ring. . . ."

"Wat'th a welkin?" inquired the Vice.

"I'll bring one and make it ring for you, one of these days," was the reply. . . .

" 'The poor doggie does not seem to like being tied up,' said the Travelling M.P. (Perhaps he thought they had tied a pretty ribbon round Faithful Fido's neck and slipped the hook under it—or bought him a nice collar for the purpose.) Fido's howls were appalling. The more he tugged the more it hurt him.

" 'Naughty doggie!' said the Travelling M.P. 'He wants to run about and play.' However, the good gentleman realised that, even as the bleating of the kid excites the tiger, the yowling of the pi-dog must attract the crocodile. He hoped he would be able to shoot it before it got near enough to really frighten poor Fido. He was that sort of kind gentleman, you know. . . . Well, Fido howled and yowled and chy-iked and made a *fearful* row. So much so that he frightened Grandpa nearly out of his twenty-foot crocodile-skin, and caused him to bury himself in the mud at the bottom of his deep hole for a fortnight. He was a very sensitive and retiring

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old party, like all fish-eating muggers, and he could not *bear* noise and commotion. He didn't really like it even when his old pals, the villagers, used to come and wash their clothes at the ford and beat them on the stones. . . .

"You *should* have heard Fido. I heard him miles away. I was staying with the Collector and he was touring in that part of the district.

" 'Sounds as though some one has trod on a pi-dog's toe,' said I to him, as we rode toward Soni.

" 'Sounds as though they're still standing on it,' said he, as the pleasing sounds continued. Then we saw the sight.

"There was the Travelling M.P. on the *machan* with a look of great determination, a rifle, and a lot of flies, staring hard along his sights at Fido. Under the *machan* sat the headman, thinking of good Lucy Gray, but looking happier than you might have expected. . . .

" 'What's up?' said the Collector, as we rode to the spot.

" 'I am heah devoting my time to ridding this village of a Scourge,' was the reply. 'This ford

is—ah—infested by a huge crocodile. I saw it myself. I understand it has been here for yeahs and yeahs. I consider it *disgraceful*. Think of the toll of human life. . . .’

“Then the headman hopped out salaaming, and unburdened his simple mind, and the Collector grinned.

“‘It wouldn’t take long to “think of the toll of human life” taken by a *garial*, a fish-eating, bottle-nosed crocodile, would it?’ he murmured to me, with a snigger.

“‘You are a public benefactor, Sir,’ said he to the Political Pimple.

“‘Yes—but I maintain that it is *disgraceful* that the public duty should be left to—ah—chance benevolence and the sense of responsibility of the casual wayfarer. What of officials about? What is the Collector . . . If I find that in the stomach of . . . reptile there are anklets and bracelets . . . anklets and—’

“‘Cut,’ said the Collector.

“‘I shall . . . the matter public . . . of the . . . ring with it. . .

“ ‘Ear! ‘Ear!’ said I, moved almost to tears by his eloquence, and then the Collector stopped him.

“ ‘Do my eyes deceive me,’ said he, ‘or is that poor wretched dog *impaled* upon a hook? What ghastly barbarity! What fiendish, awful, unparalleled brutality! . . . I am sorry to take such action against a Public Benefactor—but I am afraid that Section 74869321½, πr^2 , of the Indian Penal Code leaves me no option. I must order your arrest and——’

“ ‘*What?*’ yelled the Travelling M.P., in a voice that much resembled the voice of suffering Fido.

“ ‘That dog is *impaled*, living, upon a barbed hook,’ repeated the Collector. ‘*Barbarity*, as I said before. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals would rightly prosecute *me* if I did not prosecute you. The Press of the Empire is going to ring some more. Talk of the speakable Turk and Armenian atrocities, ——— has as much feeling as an Armenian ——— as much mercifulness as a Turk. . . .’

——— gentleman was purple and gasping. ——— threw himself off the *machan* and

galloped to where Faithful Fido sat and sang his siren song.

"Sure enough, the hook was through a bit of the scruff of poor Fido's neck.

" 'If I were that dog, I'd bite you,' said the Collector; 'even if it made me sick to do it.'

"I don't really suppose that Fido understood English. Not properly. But you'd have thought he did, if you'd seen Fido take the Collector's tip! Directly the Traveller put out his hand to pat the faithful hound, it began to feed. . . ."

"It bit him?" asked the Vice. "*Good* dog!"

"It did so. The kind M.P. wasn't fishing, but he had a bite. 'Twas no mere nibble either.

" 'Well—are you going to remove that hook, Sir,' asked the Collector, 'or must I whistle for my mounted-police orderlies and have you arrested at once?'"

"The poor Limb almost wept. You see he went through life being a Kind Gentleman to everybody (except over-worked officials, soldiers, and all people of the useful classes), and here he was caught in an act of horrible brutality, and going to be prosecuted.

“‘The *shikari* did it,’ he bleated, as he dodged Fido’s rushes.

“‘Yes. I fully expected you’d put the blame on the poor ignorant native and try and get *him* into trouble, to save your own skin—but it won’t do, Sir. Let me have your name and address at once. . . .’ You should have heard him! Well—at last the Collector softened a little, and then, much against his will, agreed to let the Traveller off—*provided he shot the Dreadful Scourge*. And he was to tie up a calf one day, a goat the next, and a dog the next—and so on to give them off-days and rests. (Fish-eating muggers are equally alarmed by lowings, bleatings, and barkings, you know.)”

“And he never shot the Virtuous Mugger?” asked Boodle.

“He hasn’t *yet*,” replied Buster. “He’s still trying.”

“When did he make the bargain with the Collector?” asked the delighted President.

“About seven years ago,” was the truthful or untruthful reply.

XIII.
THE MODERN DESDEMONA.

II *

XIII.

THE MODERN DESDEMONA.

"If you please, Daddy," said Boodle, with that punctilious politeness which might perhaps cover an error of judgment or forestall the judgment of error, we borrowed your silk hat this afternoon, and it got a little egg on it . . . " and the President wriggled, one bare foot caressing the other.

Daddy rumbled like an earthquake-threatening volcano. "Silk hat! . . . Egg! . . . Disgustin' conjunction!" Was he going to try the Discipline of Consequences and make the President wear the hat she had borrowed—wear it out for the evening walk? She rather hoped so.

But Daddy's faith in the efficacy of the Discipline of Consequences had received a rude shock, as has been told elsewhere.¹

¹ "Dew and Mildew." Longmans, Green & Co.

"And you took my silk hat in defiance of all probabilities of getting permission! You took it in anticipation of sanction! You——"

"No, Daddy—in *The Surrender of Kruger* and in *William Tell*. Fic didn't like the apple on his head, but he didn't mind it on the hat. He said it gave him a thporting chance."

"I say you took it in anticipation of sanction," rumbled Daddy horrifically, "and that is a very terrible thing!"

"What *is* antiseparation of stankshun?" asked the President, climbing on to Daddy's knee. "Can we play it? We *really* took it in *The Surrender of Kruger*, Daddy, and not in the other thing. You *couldn't* have Kruger without a top-hat, now, *could* you? But what *is* antiseparation of swanktion?"

Buster entered.

"Hullo, dear old Things," said he. "What's the game?"

"You'd better ask Buster to explain 'in anticipation of sanction,' I think," quoth Daddy, departing to see whether the hat in question

would stand one more "function" or had better be presented to the Club as a stage-property, "he does a good many things in anticipation of sanction, I believe. And some in anticipation of prohibition," he added, smiling at the blushing Buster as he closed the door. (Buster was alleged to have kissed a Miss Dolores Perdita Eulalie Francesca D'Costa, at a Sergeants' Dance, and to have had his damask cheek smacked in return.)

"Well, what *is* it, Buster? Can we play it?" inquired the President, always in search of a new drama for production.

"It's hard to *explayn*, President-Sahib," replied Buster, in the distinctly Funny-Dog vein, "though the meaning is easily made clear. Strangely enough, I heard of a good example of 'in anticipation of sanction' when I was dining with the Rutlandshires last night. You *could* act it—but, no, I shouldn't. It borders on the Not Very Nice, I think. No, better not. . . . Anyhow, don't say *I'm* the Author, if you act it before an audience. . . ."

"Tell us it as though it *were* a good play to

act," demanded the President, adding, "and I'll see if I like it."

"Very well," proceeded Buster. "*Scene*—the regimental parade-ground of the Rutland-shires. *Time*—Seven a.m., the day before yesterday.

"*Dramatis Personæ*—Private William Jones, Corporal Crook, Sergeant Small, Colour-Sergeant Crocker, The Sergeant-Major, and Second Lieutenant Snooks, Captain Crow, Lieutenant-and-Adjutant Long, Colonel Black, with all the rest of the Rutlands in the background as—you know—spectators, chorus, noise without, mob, retainers, family lawyers, and village idiots—regiment on parade in fact. . . .

"*Private William Jones to Corporal Crook*—'I feels very bad inside, I do, Corpril. . . . I'm agoin' to be ill, I am. . . .'

"*Corporal Crook to Sergeant Small*—'Jones feels very bad, 'e do. Wants to be ill, 'e does.'

"*Sergeant Small to Colour-Sergeant Crocker*—'Jones says can 'e be ill.'

"*Colour-Sergeant Crocker to Second Lieutenant*

Snooks—‘Pleasir, Privit Jones wishes ter put in a happlication to be took ill.’

“*Second Lieutenant Snooks to Captain Crow*—
‘Fellah named Jones wants to go sick, Sir.’

“*Captain Crow to Lieutenant-and-Adjutant Long who rides by on his way to the Colonel*—
‘I say—tell the Colonel there’s a bloke in A Company, Privit Jones, wants to fall out. Feels ill.’

“*Lieutenant - and - Adjutant Long to Colonel Black*—‘Private Jones, A Company, wants to be sick, Sir. May he?’

“*Colonel*—‘No, not now. Certainly not.’

“*Sergeant-Major, approaching and saluting*—
‘Please, Sir, he hev—in hanticipation of senc-
tion. . . .’”

“I see,” said Boodle. “I’ll try Fic as Private Jones. . . . Might give him cream for tea. It always . . .”

“No!” shouted Buster. “I’ll not be a party to such realism. Talk of the bloke who blacked himself all over to play Othello! No—if you want to play it, *you* be Private Jones and eat the cream.”

"Yes," agreed the President. "I love cream."

"What's 'Oh-tell-oh!'" she added. "Could we play that too?"

"Certainly," replied Buster. "Shakespearian revivals are the fashion, just now. I'll show you the pictures and tell you the story—so far as it is fit for the drawing-room. Then you can boom the Bard. The Vice would make a fine Moor—dressed in Nubian blacking and Ethiopian burnt-cork."

And it came to pass that on the following day, Othello was staged in Karabad, though the Sporting and Dramatic Press made no mention of the fact.

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"Anti-Separation of Swanksion," mused the President aloud.

"On Printhipull," soliloquised the Vice, not to be out-done. For he too had a new expression—and revelled in it, as was his wont.

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It is strange how a new phrase, a new fact, a new word, will haunt one. You may, for

example, live for half a century in blameless ignorance that there is such a disease as Cerebro-Spinal Sclerosis, discover the fact one day, and in the ensuing week you will meet seven different people who have got it. For the first time in your life you encounter the name Pffunfenphluger, and then you encounter it twice more in the next three days. A man informs you at dinner that when he was young, the boys of the village used to play a game called "knurr and spell". You remark that it is a queer and quaint name. Next morning your paper has an article on "Defunct games," and instances that of "knurr and spell". . . .

The Vice stood before the judgment seat and thoughtfully stroked his own. He was "for it" again for making the hens play "Settlers and Indians". In the capacity of Indian he had settled one of the Settlers for good. That particular bird would never settle again in this world. . . .

"I shall have to thrash you every Wednesday and Saturday night on principle, Sir—*on principle*, do you understand," Daddy had finally

rumbled as he brandished a hunting-crop with a twelve foot thong. The Vice did *not* fully understand—but he thought he did.

So *that* was the correct term was it—the term applied by adults when alluding to that portion of the human frame?

“On *principle*.” He must remember that. It must be a perfectly blameless word, a word of unimpeachable propriety, or Daddy would not use it. *Principle*.

Encountering Venus he remarked :—

“Wenuth. I am going to give you a thmack on principle—*on principle*, do you ‘underthtand,” and bestowed a resounding slap upon what he believed to be the spot indicated. “You may call it that,” he added, as he passed on.

The inevitable coincidences followed.

When the children went into the drawing-room, to kiss Mummy “good-bye,” before setting forth for the evening expedition, there were Callers having tea.

“You’ll join the hunt, I suppose, Major, for the short time you’re here?” one of the ladies was remarking to a big stout man, a new-comer.

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "I always hunt, on principle—support local industries, y'know."

It struck the Vice as a curious remark to make. Naturally he'd hunt on principle—he wouldn't do it on foot, would he? Evidently quite a drawing-room word. Not like the dreadful word with which he had shocked and sullied the young ears of Buster, Snooty, Jerks, and Birdie.

Then it was discovered to be a word publicly used by ladies of irreproachable discretion. Nice kind Miss Drake of the Zenana Mission invited the children to come to the annual *tamasha* at her school and see the little Indian orphan-girls enjoy their big treat. After the distribution of sweets and prizes by Lady Morton-Maxwell, Miss Drake made a tiny little speech, in the course of which she said there were several things they did there on principle.

The Vice quite understood that it is tiring to stand too long—especially in the heat of the day. He always lay down, himself. . . . He abandoned other valued *cliches* in favour of this new phrase, and he surprised Mr. Hunter, the new Collector, when that gentleman, seeing him

sitting in his rickshaw and contemplating the unbeginning endless sea, remarked, "Do you sit here every evening, little man?" by replying:—

"Yeth thir—on principle."

.....
"Now this is before we're married," said the President to the Vice, "and you've got to tell me wonderful fairy tales, and stories about what you've done, so as to make me fall in love with you. Venus can sit up here and be the Dog of Venice—or is it the Dodge? Anyhow, we'll call him the Dog as he *is* one. He is my father, you know, and you are my suitor."

"Do I have to shoot you, then?" inquired the Vice.

"I didn't say *shooter*," was the reply. "I said *suitor*. . . . If you don't suit me, I say 'Hop it,' and you bung off."

"I'm Oh-tell-oh, aren't I?" asked the Vice. "Is it because I have to tell these tales?"

"Spec so. You have to tell 'moving tales by flood and field,' I think Buster said. . . . Better begin with one about the Flood. And let it be

a good one or you get the push, and the next suitor tries."

The Vice was on his mettle and did his best. Where the genius of Invention failed him he turned to Adaptation's artful aid.

"Oneth upon a time there wath a Flood," he began.

"I know that," said the captious Desdemona.

"But you don't know what *I* did in it," countered Othello. "You're too clever, Mith Death de Moaner."

"Swam, I 'spec," hazarded Desdemona.

"Wrong again," repeated Othello. "You just listen, or you'll put me out."

"Father will do that," murmured Desdemona, giving the Dog, or Dodge, of Venice a pat on the head.

"It was a *norful* Flood, and rained like anything for days and days. The children couldn't go out to tea-parties and that made it worse."

"I 'spec they paddled though, and that was top-hole," hazarded Desdemona.

"Yeth—until it got too deep. Well, a Sahib named Noah told all the silly natives they'd be

drowned if they didn't buck up and build boats to get into. But they said, '*Abhi nahin*'¹ and '*Kal*,'² and it rained and rained. And Noah Sahib, he went out in the wet and built a Noah's Ark. Norful big, it was, because he was going to thave Noah Memsahib and the chota³ Noah Sahibs and choti Noah Miss-sahibs, and the butler and second-boy and cook and hamal and chokra and ayah and syces—I don't know about the sweeper—and all the people in his compound, *and* two of every kind of animal in the world! . . . He took two in case one got lost or drowned or anything—and he'd still have one left of that thort. . . .”

“He had a long way to go for Polar Bears and Kangaroos, didn't he?” interrupted Desdemona, “*and* I've heard a tale very like this before.”

“*I* fetched the Polar Bears and Kangaroos,” replied Othello modestly, and all the uvver long-way-off beathts, while Noah Sahib got on with the Noah's Ark.”

¹ Not now.

² To-morrow.

³ Little.

"I'm very sorry, Othello Sahib," said Desdemona firmly, "but I don't believe a word of it.

"Do *you*, Father?" she added, turning to the Doge, or Dodge, or Dog, of Venice.

Venus certainly shook his head violently—but this *may* have been due to the fact that a large ant was exploring the interior of his right ear.

"No—I thought you didn't," continued Desdemona, on receiving this sign of paternal incredulity. "I don't believe the little liar ever set eyes on Noah in his life."

Turning to her suitor, Desdemona fixed him with a cold and cruel eye.

"Try another," said she. "Better have a go at a 'field' one, if that's the best you can do about the flood."

"I can't think of a field one just for a minute," replied the saddened Othello, "but I wemember the piece of poetry Buthter made up about Mithter Bell of the Rutlands when he was taken ill on the field-*day*. Would that do for a 'field' story?"

"No," replied Desdemona, and, woman-like, at once added, "What was it?"

"Mithter Bell told Daddy at dinner, and I heard him over the banisters, and they all laughed and he had to tell it again. I think it was :—

"Gregory Greatorex Bell,
Sat on the trap-door of—well—
I know *Satan* came
And troubled the wame,
Of Gregory Greatorex Bell."

"Very interesting," said Desdemona. "We'll be married at once."

"Shall we, Papa?" she inquired, turning to the Dodge, or Dog, of Venice.

Venus protruded a pink tongue at surprising length, wagged his tail, and nearly yawned his head off.

"Papa smiled with pleasure at the idea of my having a wedding," interpreted Desdemona, "but he's very bored with *you*, Othello. . . . It's a pity, as he is going to live with us after we are married. Still it can't be wondered at, can it, because after all, you're only a Hubshi, aren't you, really, and most 'strornrally black."

Othello was. From head to foot, he was as black as ink, charcoal, blacking, burnt-cork and

water-colour black paint could make him. That his hair was fair almost to whiteness and his eyes very blue, were unalterable facts which militated against the general Moorishness of his get up.

Although welcoming with ardour the President's fiat that he must be blacked all over for the part, he had flatly and finally refused to wear a turban when his senior had remarked that a *puggri* would hide his hair and a pair of black glare-glasses his eyes. The *puggri* idea having to be abandoned, the President had decided that the black glare-glasses were not a success as part of an Othello make-up, as, if anything, they accentuated the unfortunate fairness of the hair. . . .

As he advanced to make some colourable demonstration of a hymeneal nature, Desdemona waved him off.

"Don't you touch me while we get married," she commanded, "nor yet afterwards. You *come off* against everything. Look at that stool!"

And indeed it was evident that Othello had

been sitting on the stool. His only garment must have slipped or something.

"Where's the ring?" asked the bride-elect.

"Othello fumbled in his trunk-hose (recently mere bathing-drawers) and discovered the necessary token. Part of its original cigar adhered to it.

"Now, we're married," said Desdemona, placing the ring upon a finger of her right hand.

"Thanks awfully. Where shall we go for our honeymoon?"

"I don't care," said Othello, and that ended Act I, Scene I.

Scene 2.

"You have to strangle me in this scene," announced Desdemona.

The eye of Othello lit up. This was going to be a better "part" than he had anticipated.

"I don't think I shall like it," added the bride.

"Oh, it'll be all-right," opined the bridegroom.

"You musn't strangle me *much*, you know," she directed.

"Only till you're dead, of courthe," he agreed.

"Go and wash your hands while I go to bed," requested Desdemona. "You'll make a norful mess of me and the bed-clothes if you don't. . . . I'll put my nighty on over the wedding-dress."

Othello departed to the bath-room since he might not strangle his bride with unwashed hands.

Desdemona put on her nightdress, and removed her shoes. She then climbed on to her bed, lay down, pulled the sheet over her and gleefully awaited what was in store for her.

Othello entered, his hands looking as though their Moorish owner wore white kid gloves.

"Half a sec," ejaculated Desdemona the Realist, "I forgot my prayers."

Kneeling up, she assumed the conventional attitude of prayer, gabbled "Fwot we are about-receive, Lord, makus trulyfankfulamen," flopped down again, and began to snore.

Othello advanced, glaring horribly, with clutching fingers, and what he conceived to be an evil smile.

He licked his lips with the lick of cruel anticipation. The nearest pigment to his mouth was blacking, and he savoured its rich flavour.

Changing his course he steered for the mirror and thrust forth his tongue. It was black. . . . Was he going to be poisoned? . . . Anyhow, it made him more Othello-like than ever. Probably Buster's friend, who blacked himself all over, quite forgot to black *his* tongue.

Desdemona watched out of one eye.

Othello turned and approached the bed, and then behaved as though playing tigers. With a growling roar he sprang at Desdemona and seized her by the throat with both white hands.

"Ee-e-e-e-e-e," shrilled Desdemona, as she felt their cold touch, and

"Ka-a-a-a-k! Ka-a-a-a-k," as the touch became a clutch.

She found that she hated being throttled when it came to the point.

"Stop it, you Sneak!" she gasped at her cruel and relentless husband. "Stop it—I didn't *do* it!"

"Didn't do what?" inquired Othello, somewhat relaxing his strangle-hold upon the poor lady's throat.

"Why, what you are strangling me for," replied the gasping Desdemona.

"There you are!" countered her remorseless husband. "You done so many things you don't even know which of them this is to pay you out for."

"Well, which *is* it, then?" squealed the fated bride, as the cruel grip again tightened about her neck, and the incensed Moor protruded a blackened and curling tongue to mark renewed vigour and determination.

"Yah! You don't know yourself," she gurgled, and by way of dying game, used her last breath in vituperative ejaculations of—

"Black Face! . . . Black Sheep! . . . Black Bird! . . . Nasty Nigger! . . . Old Hubshi! . . . Yah! . . ."

Othello desired to be just though not generous, and relaxed his grip.

"Oh, yes, I do," he said, and pondered a while. "You poked out your tongue behind my back while we were getting married, besides I'm fierce and jealous; it's in the book—Buster said so."

"Why are you fierce and jealous?" squeaked Desdemona, playing for time.

"Because you ate that last ten pounds of

chocolate I left lying on my throne this morning, while I had my porridge," replied the Moor.

"Oh, you *little* liar," shrilled the tearfully indignant Desdemona. "I never, ever."

"*What* did you call me?" inquired Othello, with deadly politeness.

"A kind of storyteller," snivelled Desdemona. "You know it's a none-truth."

"Then, by my `halibut, prepare to die—and less jabber," was the cruel answer.

"Well, I just shan't then," replied the hapless bride, and, moved to righteous indignation, fetched her lord a good useful kick in the stomach.

"'You're a 'palling little liar,' I said, and so you are."

In the fight that followed, Desdemona won, hands down, and by tacit consent the play, "Othello, the Moor of Venice," was removed from the repertoire of the Junior Curlton Club Dramatic Society.

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